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THE CHRONICLES OF A VIRGIN FORTRESS

W. V. HERBERT

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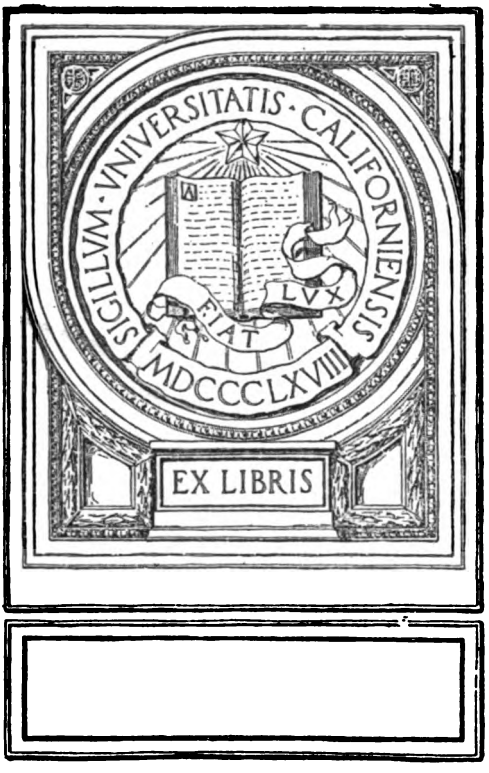

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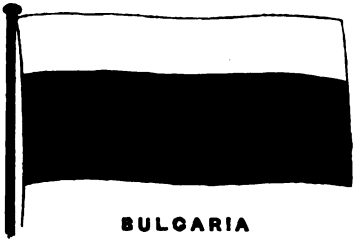
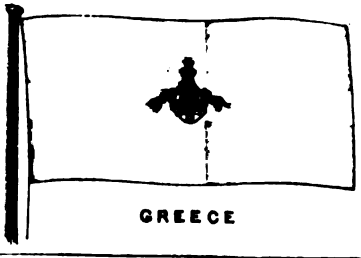


BULGARIA

SERVIA

TURKEY



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THE CHRONICLES

OF A

VIRGIN FORTRESS

BEING

SOME UNRECORDED CHAPTERS OF TURKISH

AND BULGARIAN HISTORY

BY

WILLIAM V. HERBERT

AUTHOR OF 'THE DEFENCE OF PLEVNA'

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

'The sons of the gods may save us, but never the sons of kings.'

WILLIAM MORRIS

LONDON

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PREFACE

THERE exist, undoubtedly, a good many fastnesses upon which the laudatory title "Virgin Fortress," or some other term implying, more or less boastfully, the same assertion, has, at one time or another, been bestowed by the rhymsters and chroniclers of a grateful nation, or, in excusable pride, by the citizens and defenders themselves, in commemoration of some splendidly successful achievement in valour, perseverance, and heroic endurance of sufferings. Widdin, on the Danube, up to 1878 the pride and hope of the fast-decaying Ottoman Empire, the support of its exposed north-westerly corner, since then no less the pride of autonomous Bulgaria, is the town which I have called by that honourable name in the title of the present volume, and which I have ventured to constitute its object, pivot, and purport. The suggestion for the title was made to me by a former comrade in Widdin, now residing in Australia; and as in his letter he emphasised the two words by capitals and

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inverted commas, it would appear that he quoted some author—whom, I do not know. That the title is thoroughly deserved is my task to prove in these pages.

My original project was to write a brief history of the remarkable siege of Widdin by the Roumanians in December 1877 and January 1878, which intention I announced in note 119 on page 466 of my *Defence of Plevna.* I beg leave to quote the passage *in extenso*:—

"The siege of Widdin does not belong to the scope of this work; but being interested in the fate of this town, I collected much material, the greater part of which has never been published before, and hope to address my readers on this subject in a future volume. I shall here only mention that it was an affair creditable to both sides. The Turks behaved splendidly and showed themselves in the best light. Probably the town would have remained unconquered; in any case it would have held out for weeks longer, had not the armistice put an end to the operations. In accordance with the terms of the latter, the Roumanians occupied the place, and the Turks retreated with arms, baggage, and full honours of war to Biélogradchik. Before the opposing forces parted company there was a significant exchange of civilities, the relations between Russia and her

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ally having meanwhile become extremely strained. The Ottoman soldiers paraded before the Roumanian general, and the latter's troops before the Pasha; the leaders and officers entertained each other, and the Roumanians cheered and presented arms as their late opponents marched off. In connection with the splendid behaviour of the troops of Widdin I must mention the equally fine conduct of the weak garrisons who defended the frontier against Servia. From the moment that Milan crossed the boundary (14th December) in order to share in the spoil gained by the Russian and Roumanian soldiers, he had to fight his way inch by inch, notwithstanding his enormous numerical superiority. Step by step the Turks defended their soil against this fresh invader with wonderful obstinacy. The garrisons left by Suleiman Pasha on the Montenegrin frontier are also deserving of praise on the same score. Altogether, the minor actions in the West towards the end of the war show the Turkish soldier to the best advantage; and in estimating his conduct we must not forget that these engagements were fought after Plevna had fallen—that is, after the country had received what was intended to be, and bade fair to be, its death-blow. I doubt whether there is anywhere in history a finer display of vitality, patriotism, and dogged perseverance under similar circumstances."

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Gradually I came to extend the sphere of my labour, as the knowledge grew upon me that at least one other chapter of modern history in connection with that much-fought-for town is unrecorded: the attacks of the Servians in 1885 and the heroic defence of the Bulgarian garrison. That, after I had decided to include this event, I had to make my work comprehend also the Turco-Servian War of 1876 was almost a matter of necessity. From this to brief accounts of the part which Widdin and Calafat played in the Oriental War, 1853 and 1854, and in the Russo-Turkish campaign of 1828 and 1829, and of Pasvan Oglu's remarkable rebellion in the beginning of the present century—all episodes practically unknown to the average reader—it was but a few steps more; and a general, though unavoidably sketchy, retrospect of the history of the town, since its foundation by the Romans, followed in natural sequence. This is the evolution of the present work.

The greater part of what I have stated anent the abortive attempts to subdue Widdin in 1877, 1878, and 1885 has not been recorded before in any volume existent, and is founded on material which I alone possess, obtained, partly from an officer in the Turkish service who stayed behind in Widdin in July 1877, when Osman Pasha marched with the bulk of his forces on Plevna, and who took part in

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the defence of the town against the Roumanians, partly from a civilian resident, an Austrian Jew, who lived in Widdin during the eventful years 1875 to 1885, and died there in 1887.

Much also of what I have narrated concerning the campaigns of Pasvan Oglu in 1801, Hussein Pasha in 1828, and Omar Pasha in 1854 is, I believe, new to English readers, and part of it is based on information collected on the spot in 1877.

I have included, by way of epilogue, a brief account of the Rustchuk rebellion of 1887. My reason for so doing will be apparent to the reader, and demands, I hope, no justification.

That I may have thrown a little light on a badly illumined, but fascinating by-way of history, and may have rendered this path pleasant to the pursuer, is my sincere wish. I have thought to write an entertaining and unassuming book, meant for the average reader, not a volume claiming to be abstrusely scientific, ostentatiously learned, or startlingly novel. For I maintain that a book may be good history and, at the same time, be readable. If it be held that I have failed to demonstrate this by the present humble effort, I shall be disappointed.

W. V. H.

LONDON, 1896.

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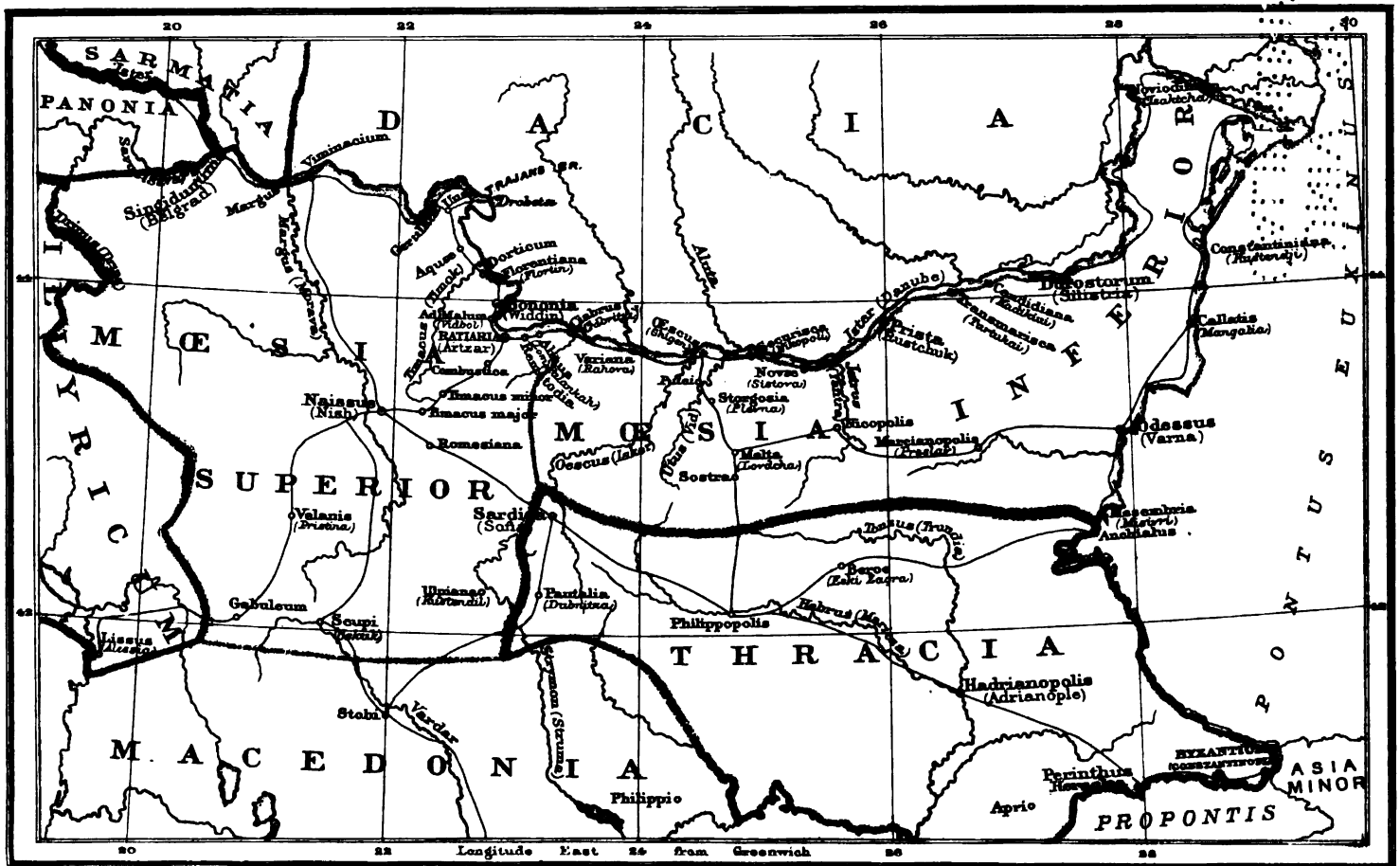
MŒSIA A.D. 250.



English Miles

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INTRODUCTION

CLASSIC AND MEDIÆVAL

Being a cursory chronicle of the Virgin Fortress, from its Roman foundation until the Turkish Conquest.

A.D. 100 to 1398.

"Love thou thy land, with love far brought
From out the storied past."

TENNYSON.

IT is a safe and a trite thing to say of almost any town in Europe that it is of Roman origin, and I know of no worse beginning to a work which humbly claims to be entertaining, and proudly repulses the reproach of learnedness. I wish I could commence with a startling announcement, such as that of the discovery that the city which makes its bow to the reader of these pages is a Chinese foundation, or one of a colony of Greenlanders gone astray on an iceberg in ages long past. But my manifold researches have not resulted in any such stirring find: stern necessity compels me to climb down from the pedestal of the successful

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investigator to the level of the dry chronicler, and state that, undoubtedly, Widdin was founded by the Romans in the first century of our era, not unlikely already during the reign of the Emperor Augustus. They called the newly-built stronghold Bononia, and it was situated on the right bank of the Ister (Danube), 10½ millia passuum (13 miles), as the crow flies, upwards of Ratiaria (the present Artzar), the capital of the province of Mœsia Superior. On its site and with its stones the Bulgars built, eight centuries later, the castle which has survived a thousand years of wars and sieges, batteries and assaults, and is to-day as good as ever; and the euphonious Latin name has apparently lived, through the Bidyn or B'dyn of the Middle Ages, to the Bodún of the modern Bulgarians, and the Widdin—pronounced V'dīn—of the Moslems.

A long line of forts protected the frontier—that is, the Ister—of the remote Hæmus provinces against the northern barbarians. Under the good Emperor Trajan the Transisterian country became incorporated with the mighty empire under the name of Dacia (about A.D. 100); but the wild men pressed from the north and the north-east, the colonisers sought shelter behind the great river, Dacia was lost to Latin civilisation, and the Danube fastnesses, Bononia among them, became once more the last outposts of Western culture and militarism,

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against the unknown and terrible North, forming the border line also between the rapidly-growing religion of the Jewish Messiah and dark Paganism. This happened in 270, the first year of Aurelian's reign.

The Romans knew their business in almost any occupation or emergency—in none better than in the building of forts. The position on the Ister-bend, facing the broad river, backed by low-lying marsh-lands, impervious to assault, was such as if it had been specially created for the erection of a stronghold. The lapse of ages has not diminished its importance: it was the same to the early Romans, to the later Greeks, to the mediæval Bulgars, to the Turks during five centuries, as it is to the Bulgarians of these latter days.

Here I am placed in the singular position of having to refute my own argument. I mentioned the low-lying marsh-lands which surround Widdin in a semicircle; and I must add that it is quite possible that these did not exist at the time of the Romans, but are a later creation by the hand of man. From some observations I made in 1877, and from information locally collected, I do not think it improbable that the two Danube tributaries, the Delenska and the Topolovitza, were, at no very remote period, led out of their courses for the purpose of strengthening the defences of the western

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approaches to the town, and thus formed the swamps and marshes which now protect it. I offer this hypothesis, fully prepared to encounter the wrath of some great man, learned in humanities, wise in his generation, and rich in suffixes, who, after the manner of his tribe, will probably send forth, from the safe precincts of his arm-chair by the fireside, the royal edict that my supposition is utterly false, that the marsh-lands of Widdin have existed from times immemorial and are a natural formation, although he has likely never been in Widdin, and has never known anybody who has been there.

However, the position of Widdin is strong without the belt of low-lying, oft-flooded meadows, and I need not detain the reader in this territory of fever-haunted swamps.

A great post road, practicable to the Roman legions, led from the mouth of the Ister, closely hugging its right bank, to where the Dravus of old, the Drave of to-day, joins it. From this point the track followed the right bank of the latter river, through the modern Austrian provinces of Slavonia, Croatia, and Carinthia, thence across the Alps into Italy. In this wise the city of Rome was connected with the Black Sea by an unbroken road 1200 miles long.

Bononia formed one of the numerous stations on

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this highway; 10 millia above was Dorticum, not far from the site of modern Rakovitza, near which the Timok river flows into the Danube, farther down Florentiana (Flortin); below were Ad Malum (Vidbol), Ratiaria (Artzar), Remetodia (half-way between Artzar and Lom Palankah), Almus (Lom Palankah), Ciabrus (Chibritzi), Variana (Rahova), Œscus (Ghigen), and so forth. But the sites of these ancient strongholds cannot always be identified with those of the modern towns, the names of which are suffixed in parentheses; the former were in many cases destroyed during the countless migrations of barbaric tribes in the fourth and fifth centuries, and not until half a millennium afterwards did the Bulgars commence to rebuild the towns, during the first supremacy of their race (864 to 969). In doing so they invariably employed the solid stones of the ruins bequeathed to them by the Roman colonisers, but not always on the spot; for instance, the remnants of Ratiaria and Remetodia were undoubtedly requisitioned, in addition to those of Bononia, to erect the Bulgar castle of Widdin. To mention another example, there were in 1877, two miles to the south of Plevna, ruins which I, in my youthful ignorance, took to be of Roman origin, and stated to be such in my work on the historic defence of that town by Osman the Victorious; but since its publication a gentleman

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learned in many things has informed me that it is not a Roman relic at all, simply the wreck of a mediæval Bulgar fort, built of stones transported thither from the remnants of Roman Melta, the modern Lovdcha or Lovatz.[1]

Of the great Danube road no trace remains as regards the stretch between Artzar and Rakovitza, which is the only portion that concerns us. It has probably been washed away by the river or covered with the sediment of its waters. True, there is a road between Artzar and Widdin; but, whatever it may be to-day, it was in 1877 in such a poverty-stricken condition that no patriotic Roman would have owned to it,—not a bad road, certainly, for the Turks of the nineteenth century, but utterly below the Roman standard of A.D. 100 or thereabouts. Well I remember tramping it in 1877, on April 23rd, to Widdin, and on July 13th, during Osman Pasha's world-famed march to the imperishable glory of Plevna defence; it did not strike me as in the least classic, only sordidly, brutally Turkish, indicative of thorough-paced Ottoman slovenliness, squalor, and impecuniosity. To my thinking it lies at least 300 yards inland of the old Roman highway. To the north of Widdin the present road to Flortin —a short cut, avoiding the river bend—undoubtedly does not follow the direction of the more tortuous

[1] These small figures throughout refer to Notes at end of volume.

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Latin predecessor, of which no solid trace remains. In connection with roads I shall add that the stretch Storgosia (Plevna)–Œscus (Ghigen) which existed in the second century, according to the best authorities, has absolutely disappeared,—a significant occurrence this, that every communication should cease where once a much-trodden highway bound important communities together; there was in 1877 not even a path between those places, as I remember but too well in my campaign experience. The half-way stage, Putei of the ancient geographers, appears also to have vanished; its site cannot have been far from the present hamlet Demirkiui. What terrible vicissitudes the country must have undergone—of a broad highway, built with Roman care, solidity, and lavishness, not a footpath is left to give evidence of prosperous periods lapsed into brutality and decay! With this digression I shall relieve the grateful reader of further disquisitions on roads, Roman or rotten, and conclude the classical part of my history.

On the division of the Empire in 395, Bononia fell naturally to the share of Byzantium. In the fourth and fifth centuries the vast westward migration of Asiatic millions flooded also Mœsia. Whence came these awful hordes? To the excited fantasy of the ponderer over this terrible episode, it would almost seem as if there had existed, somewhere in

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the deep dark wilds of mystic Serica, a pregnant caldron, seething and broiling, which bore, in whirling swiftness and dizzy fecundity, countless units of crude humanity, tribes and nations entire, predestined to be God's lash for Occidental corruption. Visigoths and Ostrogoths, Huns and Avars, followed each other in rapid and murderous succession, leaving death and desolation in their wake; and only the last of the new comers settled in the country permanently towards the middle of the seventh century: a tribe of Slavs, who styled themselves Slovenes, and gave the name of Sclavinia to the province, under which appellation it appears henceforth in the chronicles of the Byzantine Empire. To the latter they became tributary, since some of the ancient strongholds, Bononia among them, had bravely withstood the stupendous rush of the barbaric hordes for the fabulous wealth reported to be amassed in the countries toward the setting sun.[2] But only a generation later, in 679, an event happened which imparted a fresh and powerful element into the heterogeneous crew of the Hæmus provinces, shaped the course of the Balkan history anew and lastingly, and even gave a name to a nameless nation of bastards. A small tribe, called the Bulgars, from their original domicile on the Volga,[3] of Finno-Ugrian origin (Mongolic stock)—who had on

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previous occasions invaded and devasted the peninsula, and caused severe anguish and bloody sacrifice to senile Byzantium—crossed the lower Danube from ancient Dacia,[4] and spread over Sclavinia as conquerors. They found the Slovenes tilling the fertile soil and breeding cattle; and, being themselves not addicted to, or accomplished in, peaceful pursuits, they had the good sense to leave the subjected majority undisturbed in their wealth-producing vocations. Not only that: they adopted the language of the vanquished, and the Bulgarian of to-day is a Slav tongue pure and simple, with few traces of the Finno-Ugrian conquest. They intermarried, and the descendants of the wise alliance inhabit the land this day. Thus the modern Bulgarian has retained only the name of the victorious invaders: language, physiognomy, racial characteristics, habits, and occupation, are those of the defeated. In fact, considering that the Slovenes must have outnumbered the Bulgars by at least ten to one, it is not too much to say that the latter were virtually exterminated by force of assimilation to the majority, and that the Bulgarians of to-day bear that name wrongfully. How the small tribe succeeded in conquering the vast nation is not recorded. The latter were peaceable, and spread over a large area; the former were warriors by desire, vocation, and practice, and

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attacked in solid columns scattered settlements: *divide et impera.*

The amalgamated peoples made themselves independent of Byzantium in many a sanguinary campaign. In 864 they embraced Christianity, having up to that year confessed to a curious mongrel blend of much paganism, a little Islam, and the crude faith of some of the Slovenes previously converted by Byzantine missionaries. The man who worked this wonder, Cyril the apostle, gave the Bulgarians also the characters called after him, which they, in common with the Servians and Russians, use this day.

In the same year (864) the chief, Michael Boris, founded the first Bulgarian empire. His son and successor, Symeon, called himself Cæsar (Czar) of the Bulgars and Autocrat of the Eastern Romans (Roumanians).

Bononia, too, had fallen to the young race, probably about 700, and from this moment the history of Widdin is identical with that of the Bulgarians,—a history of cruelty and horrors almost unequalled in the blood-stained annals of the fates of nations, but which gives the regenerated people of to-day a tremendous impulse towards a high development, in the memory of a mighty past, distinguished in conquest and solid unity under strong personalities, as well as a solemn warning,

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embodied in the records of civic strife, disruption, dismemberment when the thrones were foul and quaking, and final craven subjugation to an alien race.

The first Bulgar empire lasted one century (864 to 969). Under Symeon, the typical hero-czar of the nation (888 to 927), it reached its greatest strength and prestige; it extended from the Danube in the north to the actual Turco-Greek frontier in the south, from the Black Sea in the east to the Adria in the west. The country between the Karpathians and the Danube (the present Roumania, Transylvania, and part of Hungary), which had at one time belonged to the Bulgarians, had been lost at an early stage of the supremacy of their race to the rush of the invading Magyars.

The whole period is crowded with endless, senseless, resultless wars against Byzantium, the Magyars, and the Servians, full to repletion of horrors, cruelties, and miseries incredible, the record of which can find no place in these pages, since Bononia, now called Bidyn, played no individual rôle in the long and bloody drama.

The split of the Bulgar empire into two parts (963) caused the eastern portion to be subjugated, first by the Russians (967), then by the Greeks (971); whilst the western part found a powerfully

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guiding hand in the person of the Czar Samuel (977 to 1014), the Napoleon of the nation, who restored Bulgarian splendour, prestige, prosperity, and success in conquest, and founded the second supremacy of his race (977 to 1018). It ended four years after his death, when the Greek Emperor Basilios subjected the whole peninsula once more to Byzantine sway. This monarch had taken Widdin already in 1002, after a siege of eight months, and lost it again in the same year, but recovered it sixteen years later.

For 170 years Bulgaria was a province of the great Greek Empire, was gagged and held in bondage by rigour and terror. In 1186 the brothers Azen, Peter, and Joannes guided a racial revolt to the goal of success; the former was crowned Czar, and became founder of the third and last Bulgarian independence (1186 to 1398), which withstood the onslaughts of Byzantium, of the Servians—a nation newly aroused to the glory of freedom and conquest, and growing in power stupendously—and, lastly, of the warlike and fanatical Osmanlis, the constantly increasing danger to the safety of Europe, whose aim was clearly to spread Islam over the entire world, and before whose astounding bravery and impetuosity all Christendom, united for once, if only in fear, trembled. In the first and second Bulgar empire

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Preslav[5] had been the capital; in the third, Tirnova was raised to the splendour of a czar's city, and to this day the Bulgarians look upon the picturesque town as hallowed by the memory of a glorious past, when their country was the bulwark of Christianity against the terrific aggression of the false faith.

Unhappily the Eastern Christians were divided when, in face of the daily growing danger, they should have been united and strong. The Bulgars were beaten by the Servians in 1330 near Küstendil, in a bloody and barbarous battle, and had to yield to the victors the supremacy in the Hæmus countries, although they did not actually come under Servian sway; but in 1356 the death of the great Serb-Czar Stephan Dushan Zilni broke the heterogeneous Serb empire into splinters, and Bulgaria recovered her position and prestige in the peninsula.

During this period Bidyn seems to have belonged for some little time to the Servians (between 1292 and 1324), having been ceded to them in exchange for some Rhodopé districts, lost in warfare and recovered by barter. But in a more important sense, also, the town played an individual rôle: it gave the Bulgarians their last emperors. A grandee named Shisman, residing in Bidyn, rendered himself independent of the Tirnova Czar (1291), adopted the princely dignity, and made Bidyn

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capital of a West Bulgarian kingdom. In the following year he was beaten by the Servians, and had to accept the terms of peace dictated to him in his own city. But Michael, his son, was crowned in Tirnova Czar of once more united Bulgaria (1324), and his dynasty, known as the Widdin Shismanides, reigned until the fall of the empire (1393).

The stupendous onward rush of the Crescent held Europe in thrall. Vain were the alliances of kingdoms and nations, foes from time immemorial, friends for once in face of the daily growing danger: the banner of the half-moon was irresistible. A united Servo-Bulgarian army was beaten on the Maritza near the site of the modern town Chirmen in 1371, Adrianople fell and became the capital of Sultan Murad, the seemingly invincible, and on the 15th June 1389 the Turks annihilated the vast army composed of the whole of the arms-carrying Christian population of the peninsula—Servians, Bulgarians, Greeks—in a battle of giants fought on the Amselplain of Kosovo, near the modern town Pristina. Once more Bulgaria split in two—Tirnova and Widdin—facilitating the completion of conquest to the victorious Turks: Tirnova fell in 1393; in 1394 the Osmanlis abolished the Bulgarian Church, and in 1398 Widdin, the last stand of the nation, succumbed to the Crescent.

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Constantinople held out for 55 years longer. In 1453 the capital of the moribund Christian Empire in the East became the residence of Sultan Mohammed II., who, on entering the ruined city, deeply stirred by the momentous event, cited the words of a Persian poet :—

"The spider has woven her web in the mighty imperial palace,
Whose loftiest towers resound with the owl's inglorious cry."

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CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

Being a brief account of the warlike events in and around Widdin, from the Turkish Conquest to the end of the eighteenth century.

1398 to 1797.

"Ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land."
TENNYSON.

THE imperial cities, Tirnova and Widdin, had fallen, and the banner of the Crescent floated over the Bulgar castles. The proud czardom of Boris and Samuel was dead.

For nearly five centuries Bulgaria was a province of the Turkish Empire. During half a millennium the people were crushed, down-trodden, gagged, isolated from the progress of culture and civilisation, kept ignominiously in bondage, material and spiritual.

In those 480 years of Bulgarian thraldom and inglorious subjugation of the Cross, the ever-spreading Ottoman supremacy came into frequent collision with the powers of the West. First with

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the Magyars, now definitely settled in Hungary; these being vanquished, with Austria and the German Empire. Twice (1529 and 1683) the Turks stood before the gates of Vienna. Both sieges were unsuccessful. The latter marked the turning-point in the career of the Crescent. Hungary was lost to Islam, and the Osmanlis had to content themselves with Servia, Wallachia, and Moldavia as their westernmost and northernmost possessions. The history of this period—an almost unbroken record of slaughter—can concern us only in so far as Widdin is drawn into the vortex of warfare.

To do full justice to the Virgin Fortress—which constitutes the purpose of the present volume—we must make a retrograde digression, to the holocaust on the Amselplain, where the rivalry between Cross and Crescent in the Peninsula was finally decided in favour of the latter.

The last czar of the Bulgar empire was Joannes Stracimir, of the dynasty of the Widdin Shismanides, and his residence, after the catastrophe of the year 1389, was Widdin. Him the Magyars, previous to the battle, had kept prisoner for four years. In 1394 Sultan Bayazid I. occupied Widdin; in 1395 he was driven away by the Magyars, who bestowed upon the luckless town the doubtful blessing of a strong alien garrison; in the next year the Sultan

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again captured the much-fought-for city, and was again immediately dispossessed; until at length, in 1398, Widdin succumbed to the Moslems, apparently for good, and with it fell the remnant of the Bulgar empire. These simple dates will suffice to prove that the town had fought obstinately and had died hard; that, through it, and through it alone, the Bulgarian nation had made a brave last stand.

But whereas now the Balkan Peninsula was Turkish and Mohammedan for ever, and no one dared dispute the fact, Widdin was to change hands twice again, and to be coveted, assailed, and defended repeatedly.

The Margrave of Baden guided the Cross and the German eagle to Widdin's walls after the town had been, for nearly 400 years, an unchallenged and undisturbed Moslem possession. On the 14th October 1689, his army—which had marched from Nish in eight days, at that time a fine performance—stormed the fortress, but made no impression. Five days later, however, the weak Turkish garrison surrendered voluntarily, and the ordnance of only twenty-one guns fell to the victors, who took immediate steps to strengthen and extend the lines of fortification, deeming the town now their eternal property. But the unexpected always happens. In the following year the Turks, aided by Transylvanian

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and Hungarian rebels and traitors,—among them the notorious Count Tököly (Tekely), who had been the originator of the second Turkish siege of Vienna, seven years before,—recaptured the fortress by storm; the remnants of the imperial army beat a somewhat inglorious retreat, and the Osmanlis were left to enjoy the benefit of a fastness much improved by their foes.

Nearly forty years later Widdin was to have another glimpse of the imperial eagle. In the Austro-Turkish campaign of 1737 Field-Marshal Khevenhüller was commanded to attack the fortress. His army numbered 35,000 men; the garrison was 7000 strong. But he made so many blunders during his march from Nish—which took him a fortnight—that he really never came to attack at all. His vanguard was completely annihilated (on the 14th August 1737) in one of the *extra muros* suburbs of Widdin. Finding the Turks, much to his surprise, well equipped, brave, and hopeful, and receiving a haughty message from their commander that the town would be held until the last man had perished, Khevenhüller simply pitched camp near Artzar, a few miles inland, and did nothing, whilst Widdin received supplies and reinforcements by river. He did not even think it worth his while to watch the Danube. Early on the 8th October 1737 the Turks recovered

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Nish, and Khevenhüller's position became untenable. He retreated the same evening, actually without having struck a blow, and marched all night westward. The Turks sallied forth and pursued, and on the morrow the Austrian rearguard of 1200 men was surprised in the Vreska Chuka Pass and completely annihilated, after a desperate resistance—all but two men, whom the victors spared and liberated, so that they might apprise their comrades of the catastrophe. The Austrian attempt upon Widdin had ended even more ingloriously than that of the Margrave of Baden.

In this campaign the sympathies of the Christian populace of Widdin and neighbourhood were, wholly and actively, on the side of the Turks, owing to Austria's frightful mismanagement of Servia during the years 1718 to 1737. This is an important point, one to which I shall have to recur, at greater length, in a subsequent chapter, when speaking of the tendencies for and against the Ottoman reign of the Bulgarian rayahs.[6]

The next military event in the district was the storming of the fortifications of Calafat, the Wallachian village opposite Widdin, on the 26th June 1790, by the Austrian General Clerfayt, during the war between Turkey on one hand, and Russia and Austria on the other (1787 to 1792). But Widdin was not disturbed—the enemy dared not attack it,

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so strong a fastness was it reported to be, and, in truth, for those times the town was impregnable—and the danger passed by.

With this we have arrived at the end of the eighteenth century, and the dawn of the nineteenth opens our history proper.

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CHAPTER II

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES

Being an account of the janissary rebellion of Pasvan Oglu, Pasha of Widdin; of the warlike doings, at Widdin and Calafat, of Hussein Pasha, Grand Vizier and exterminator of the janissaries; and generally of events in and around Widdin during the first half of the nineteenth century.

1797 to 1853.

"Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs."
SHAKESPEARE.

THE old century died and the new was born, for the town of Widdin, amid a commotion the like of which its ancient and storm-buffeted walls had never beheld before, neither had any other city of the great Ottoman Empire (which has always been singularly free from dissensions among its loyal subjects, the Moslems) ever been the scene of so stirring and strange an event: the rebellion of the famous Osman Pasvan Oglu Pasha (1797 to 1801). As this is a remarkable and not too well-known episode, and as Pasvan Oglu was a remarkable and commanding personality, the kindly reader will look

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with indulgence upon a hasty sketch of both man and event.

Pasvan Oglu came from a family of grandees of purest Tartar descent, settlers in Widdin since the Turkish conquest. His grandsire in the twelfth generation had helped the Sultan Bayazid to storm the Bulgar stronghold. In the campaign against Russia and Austria of 1788 to 1791 he had distinguished himself. When peace was made (January 1792) he returned to Widdin, and in course of time became a notability of his native city. His sovereign, Selim III., like all his predecessors, desired to abolish the omnipotent corps of janissaries, who formed the nucleus of Turkey's standing army, and who — as prætorian guards have ever been—were the real masters of the land, making and unmaking, appointing and dismissing, incarcerating and killing, crowning and dethroning pashas, viziers, generals, officials, ministers, princes, and sultans, as they listed. Unlike most of his precursors Selim had the courage of his opinions, and took active steps to have his will enforced.

In Pasvan Oglu the janissaries had a friend and supporter. Those of Servia and North-Western Bulgaria crowded around him, and the audacious chief, from his seat in Widdin, actually declared war upon the thunderstruck Padishah (1797). What

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Pasvan Oglu desired and worked for was to be a semi-independent Sultan of Widdin, like the Beys of Fez, Morocco, Algiers, and Tripoli. Before the outbreak of hostilities, and in order to avoid such, Pasvan Oglu sent a message to the Stamboul serai, claiming the pasha dignity of the pashalik (county) Widdin, the "three tails," and the continuance of the janissaries as the price of peace and submission. Selim refused peremptorily, and ordered the despatch of an army of 100,000 men. Pasvan Oglu responded by enrolling his own name among the janissaries, issuing a regal proclamation to the good people of the Danube province and of Servia, and calling himself Kral (King) of Widdin. From all sides he received succour, particularly from Belgrad, the centre of the Western janissaries, and soon he counted an army of 50,000 men in and around his royal city. The Moslems clung to him, as they invariably do to splendour and brazen assumption; the rayahs loved him because his venture promised a change of mastership, and he was very good to the poor, being possessed of enormous wealth; the Jews always sail with the wind, and the establishment of a regal court was good for trade; the janissaries simply worshipped him, the warrior of many fights, the strong, the unscrupulous. The imperial army—commanded by the Fanariot and hospodar[7] Michael Sutsos—

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appeared before Widdin, where Pasvan Oglu had concentrated his forces. The latter made an impetuous sortie (1801), and in a ferocious battle the Sultan's army was completely routed, in fact, wiped out; 20,000 men were slain. Pasvan Oglu had now a free hand. First he devastated Wallachia as far as, and including, Crayova. Then he returned to his own bank and did the same kind service to Bulgaria. He actually penetrated, Danube-downwards, to Nikopoli, which he besieged, stormed, conquered, sacked, and burned. The whole country was literally in flames, the whole Empire in a state of anarchy, and Widdin rejoiced exceedingly. The Sultan, trembling in his shoes, offered peace, complying with all the conditions imposed by the rebel, and assuring a general amnesty. Pasvan Oglu accepted, sheathed his sword, went quietly back to Widdin, dismissed his army, and laid aside his battered arms for ever, in possession of the pashalik dignity, with the coveted three appendages. His janissaries retired unmolested to Belgrad, and the time-honoured institution was saved for a while. Not until 1826 did it find its end, in the streets of Stamboul, at the hands of the Sultan Mahmoud II., his Grand Vizier, Hussein Pasha, the newly-founded Nizamié (regular army), and the rabble, amid incredible horrors. The provinces imitated

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the capital, and had little massacres of their own, much after the manner of the French St. Bartholomew's Eve. 8000 janissaries were burned alive in a building where they had sought shelter; 20,000 were killed in combat or executed subsequently; the same number was sent into Arabic exile. The very name Yenicheri (new troops) was cursed with a solemn anathema.

To return to Pasvan Oglu. Both parties to the treaty—he and the Sultan—kept honourably the contract, and the peace of Widdin was not disturbed again. For six years Pasvan Oglu governed in the pashalik, wisely and well, practically independent of, though nominally in submission to, Stamboul. A most formidable foe, he was a staunch friend, and possessed that quality so rare in a Turk (and in a Christian, for all that) when once in power—gratitude. How good a friend he was to his native city the reader will perceive when, presently, he will be summoned to accompany me in a stroll through the streets. He developed the resources of the district, promoted commerce and industry, thrift, tolerance, and Western culture, introduced many European innovations, strengthened the defences, erected buildings galore and streets entire. To the poor he gave with a free hand, and no clamouring petitioner or whining beggar ever left his serai unsatisfied. He

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was hospitable to a degree, entertained sumptuously many travellers and notabilities, both Turkish and Western, kept a big house, circulated his wealth without stint. He died in 1807, full of honours, worshipped by the populace of all classes, creeds, and races, and was buried within the walls of the city he loved so well. In the same year the Stamboul janissaries dethroned his sovereign and former foe, Selim III.

By a strange freak of fate Hussein Pasha, the Grand Vizier and principal adviser to Sultan Mahmoud II., and the exterminator of the janissaries, died also in Widdin forty years later, and is likewise interred within the city gates. This is the man of the visit to whom, in 1839, Moltke has given such a graphic account.

A curious mixture was Pasvan Oglu—in war bloodthirsty, cruel, rapacious, and merciless beyond description, recalling the Attilas and Alarics of old, in peace and to his dependents a very father in kindness and wisdom. He was benevolent, charitable, and generous as Turk never was before or has been since; he had a high sense of the individual's duty to the commonweal, and his reign in the pashalik may with advantage be taken as a model by any governor or *Statthalter*.

But the strangest freak of nature in Pasvan Oglu's mental constitution is to be found in the

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fact that he, the upholder of every old institution, the inveterate foe of every new, the last of the great janissary leaders, the last of the grand pashas in the old style, was the most active man in all reforms and innovations, so far as the administration of his own pashalik and the interior economy of his native city were concerned. A terrible enemy to contend against, a loyal friend to fight for, a great warrior, a wise ruler, and an exemplary citizen—such was Osman Pasvan Oglu, Pasha of Widdin.

Pasvan's successor in the pashalik was Molla, a mild and beneficent ruler, who acknowledged freely the sovereignty of Constantinople—whereas under Pasvan Widdin had been practically autonomous—and who made many important concessions to the oppressed rayahs. After him came Hussein Pasha, already mentioned, with the blood-stained laurels of his horrible exploit still fresh upon him, who was, however, a far better ruler than his antecedents might lead the reader to suppose, being just, though stern, and for a Turk singularly free from corruption. His follower was Sami Pasha, chiefly remarkable as an inveterate foe of Germans and German "missions," and as the friend of England and France. Sami issued a stupid decree, forbidding the rayahs dwelling within the city walls to erect new houses; and, incredible as it may seem,

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it was not until 1862 that this law was rescinded by Suleiman, the then pasha, much to the advantage of both the appearance and the cleanliness of the town. The pretty southern Christian suburb, to be mentioned hereafter, dates from this year.

Since all the nineteenth century pashas of Widdin, from Pasvan Oglu's brilliant beginning to Haji Aziz's inglorious end, will appear in these pages, I append a list, with their terms of office-tenure :—

Pasvan Oglu . .	1801 to 1807.
Molla	1807 to 1828.
Hussein . . .	1828 to 1847.
Sami	1847 to 1860.
Suleiman . . .	1860 to 1870.
Aziz	1870 to 1874.
Haji Aziz . . .	1874 to 1878.

For easier reference I subjoin also a list of the latter-day sultans :—

Selim III. . . .	1789 to 1807.
Mustapha IV. . .	1807 to 1808.
Mahmoud II. . .	1808 to 1839.
Abdul Mejid . .	1839 to 1861.
Abdul Aziz . . .	1861 to 1876.
Murad V. . . .	1876.
Abdul Hamid II. . .	since 1876.

Between Pasvan Oglu's reign and the Crimean War Widdin was repeatedly the scene of military enterprise.

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In the Servian wars of liberation (1804 to 1817) the town was the Turks' base of operations, and effectually held the districts of Pirot, Nish, Saitchar, and Negotin in check. Simultaneously the Porte was again at war with Russia. Calafat was occupied and armed by the Ottoman troops, but nothing was undertaken either from it or against it.

In the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 and 1829, Widdin caused much anguish and bloody sacrifice to the enemy. The two offices of pasha and military commander happened to be united in one person—the grim Hussein, an experienced warrior, who had at the beginning only a small force (5000 men), and that mostly irregulars; but he managed it so well that he was enabled to do a good deal of harm to the Russian corps of observation under General Geismar, which consisted of four regiments of infantry, four of cavalry, two of Cossacks, and five batteries, total 13,000 men and thirty-four guns. The Russian base of operations for this quarter was Crayova, the Turkish Widdin – Calafat. Hussein inflicted a severe defeat upon the Russians on the 18th August 1828 at Golentzé, near Calafat, seized their camp and stores, pursued them as far as Crayova, devastated the country in the good old Turkish fashion, and then returned to Calafat. For a month he harassed the Russians by capturing

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their supplies. But on the 26th September, the Turks, meanwhile reinforced to 26,000 men (of whom half were irregular cavalry) and thirty guns, were defeated, in spite of their conspicuous bravery, in an assault upon the Russian camp at Czoroy (half-way between Crayova and Calafat), and the same night a dashing Russian surprise attack upon the Turkish camp of Boyeleshti caused them to seek safety in flight. Hussein Pasha, the Turkish commander, and Kiaya Pasha, his adjutant, escaped by the skin of their teeth, the one on an ass, the other afoot. Many Turkish officers were shot by their own men, whose crazy flight they vainly tried to stop. The Turks owned to a total loss of 3000 men in killed, wounded, and missing during this disastrous double battle; but presumably the casualties were far in excess of that figure. They sacrificed also their camp, their stores, seven guns, twenty-four standards, some hundreds of vehicles, and nearly 5000 horses. The Russian losses amounted to 1500 men.

With admirable promptitude the Turks rallied at Calafat, and two days after the battle they were once more ready for the fray. But the Russians made no attack upon the strong Widdin–Calafat position. On the 25th October, however, Hussein, acting upon orders received from Stamboul, evacuated Calafat voluntarily, and re-

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treated to Widdin, burning the wooden bridge which connected the two places. The Russians occupied, fortified, and armed Calafat forthwith. But throughout the campaign of 1829 the two towns faced and threatened each other without coming to blows, much as they did five decades later, when I was in Widdin. A few shots were exchanged, and that was all. The treaty of Adrianople (24th September 1829) put an end to the hostilities. The bridge was rebuilt and Calafat once more garrisoned by Turkish troops.

For nearly a quarter of a century Widdin enjoyed tranquillity and prosperity. In 1849 popular excitement was stirred, and the slumbering military recollections of the residents were roused, by the sight of large gangs of Hungarian rebels, who, having entered Turkish, that is, neutral territory for that purpose, were disarmed in Widdin, and their weapons and uniforms were incorporated with Sami Pasha's newly-founded Museum of Arms. Louis Kossuth himself came to the town in disguise, was recognised, arrested, and promptly despatched into durance vile—first to Shumla, then to Kutahia in Asia Minor—for the Sultan wished to propitiate Austria.

In 1852 the dwindling Mohammedan population of Widdin received an increase, by a score of families, through the immigration of Turks hitherto

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residing in Servia, who preferred the more congenial atmosphere of the Sultan's undisputed dominions, and in the same year a questionable blessing was bestowed upon the vicinity in the shape of its first allotment of Circassian settlers.

This is the last year with which the present chapter deals, for with the 4th October 1853, the date of the Sultan Abdul Mejid's conditional declaration of war upon the Czar Nicholas I., we have arrived at a new, an international and contemporary, stage of our history.

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CHAPTER III

INTRA MUROS

Giving a picture of Widdin, as the author beheld it.

"Here, at the half-way house of life, I linger."
BUCHANAN.

SINCE it is always desirable to append to a volume of history a geographical sketch, however meagre, of the place around which that history was developed, I was placed before this question: Shall I give an account of Widdin as I saw it eighteen years ago, and speak as an eye-witness? Or shall I be the compiler of a description of that town as it stands to-day? For, to my bitter regret and disappointment, I have never had either the time or the money to revisit the scene of my youthful exploits, the place of many a pleasant recollection and many a cherished association, the stage on which the dramas of my first love and my first friendship were enacted, where I saw the surpassing charm and glamour of warfare, and none

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of its horrors—the realisation of which latter commenced only with the dawn which beheld me turn my back on the town, never to see it again, as it turned out.

After mature deliberation I adopted the first of the two courses indicated, hoping that the task of perusal may prove as pleasant to the reader as that of writing was to the chronicler. In justification of my decision, I can but say that the advantages of being a truthful and observant eye-witness (and I humbly claim to be both) outweigh those of being a compiler, however painstaking, and that the gravest and most absorbing of the events with which this history deals took place only a few months after I had reluctantly taken my departure from the spot which was to be the scene of that event.

On the 23rd April 1877, a day before the Czar Alexander II. declared himself to be in a state of hostility towards his near neighbour and dear brother, the Sultan Abdul Hamid II., I, who held the rank of lieutenant in the Ottoman infantry (salary everlastingly in arrears), arrived in one of the permanent camps attached to the fortress Widdin, in charge of a small detachment, with which I had tramped from Bellova, then the terminus of the railway, across the Balkan Mountains *via* Sofia, Berkovitza, and Lom Palankah. I

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was an inmate of the canvas city for twelve weeks, that is, up to the 13th July, on which day Osman Pasha moved with the bulk of his corps towards Plevna and immortal glory. Whenever I had a few hours' leave of absence, which happened ten or twelve times, I betook myself "to town," whither allured me *cabarets*, *cafés*, the female sex, and all other such squalid gaieties as an Eastern city can proffer to one growing weary of the monotony of camp life, the stringency of discipline, the rigour of warlike exercise, the strains of constant watchfulness. Upon that which I saw, heard, felt, and *smelt* on those momentous occasions my description is chiefly based.

The town of Widdin, situate on the right bank of the Danube, in round numbers 150 miles below Belgrad, and 400 miles above the estuary, counted in 1877, 13,000 peaceful inhabitants. This is the figure which was named to me by a Turkish official; but as there had never been a census it is open to question. The Bulgarian census of 1888 yielded the numbers 13,435, namely, 6929 Bulgarians, 3387 Turks, 1304 Jews, 1815 "various" and foreigners.

Of these 13,000 fully one-half were Bulgarians, a fourth Turks, the rest being composed (in order of magnitude) of "Frankish" Jews, Tsintsars,[8] Roumanians (Wallachians), Servians, Gypsies,

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Circassians, Greeks, Armenians, "Spanish" Jews, Pomakes, and Austrians—a motley crew, to be sure!

The Bulgarians were traders, artificers, artisans, and formed the bulk of the labouring class.

The Turks, in Widdin as elsewhere, lacked commercial enterprise, and confined themselves to retail trade, handicraft, and manual labour.

The wholesale trade was principally in the hands of the Jews, Greeks, Armenians, and Austrians.

The important Danube fisheries were worked by Turks, Bulgarians, and Wallachians.

The saddlery industry was exclusively Bulgarian; the filigree industry was peculiar to Turks and Tsintsars. Both were home or cottage industries.

The Tsintsars, a Latin tribe, settled principally in Macedonia, are Christians. They speak a Latin dialect which has never been reduced to lexicographical and grammatical bondage, and use Greek as the means of communication with strangers. They call themselves "Romuni" (Romans), and are very proud of their origin.

The Jews of Widdin, whose number was estimated in 1877 at 1000, were mostly of Slavonian origin, hailing from Galicia, Transylvania, Hungary, Poland, some few from Russia and Roumania; but there was also a sprinkling (perhaps a hundred)

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of Spanioles, so called from their Spanish or Portuguese descent.[9] These two classes of Israelites differed essentially in physiognomy, language, custom, garb, and ritual, the Spanioles being by far the more advanced. Their occupation divided the Jews into two categories, between which there was no middle course: rich merchants, serafs (money-changers, bankers), and usurers, and poverty-stricken petty dealers.

The Pomakes (also called Pandokes in this part of the country) are Mohammedans of Bulgarian descent, the conversion dating from the sixteenth century. In the Rhodopé districts they form a tribe of their own. They were numerous also in the neighbourhood of Plevna and Lovdcha, but in Widdin they were of small moment. The Pomakes have furnished the bulk of the material for the countless bands of brigands which have infested the Balkan and Rhodopé Mountains for centuries past, up to recent times. They shared the characteristic of all renegades, inasmuch as they were more fanatical than the Mohammedans proper.

The Gypsies were not numerous within Widdin, but there existed a good many colonies of this thieving, dirty, vicious, disreputable gentry in the surrounding villages. They had a language of their own (derived direct from Sanskrit, so I

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am told), and had abandoned the nomadic habits peculiar to the race, being mostly rural settlers.

The Circassians, who, like the Gypsies, preferred the villages, were the descendants of that tribe which, during the Crimean War, and shortly before and after, overran both Asiatic and European Turkey. It is calculated that between 1850 and 1864, 380,000 individuals, or three-fourths of the nation, crossed over from Russian to Turkish territory, in the wilds of the Caucasus Mountains, forswore Christianity, or rather that barbarous mixture of paganism and Christianity which they honoured by the latter name, and embraced Islam. They were brave, hardy, and of splendid physique, the women being singularly handsome, but lazy, brutal, savage, cruel, and heartily disliked by all classes.

The commonwealth of Widdin consisted of the famous old industry peculiar to that town and to Lom Palankah: gold and silver filigrees; of grain export, fisheries, transhipping, and to a minor extent of the making of saddlery and the export of salt and wine. The filigree industry was estimated at T.£60,000 annually, the fisheries at T.£25,000. Both filigrees and saddlery exhibited the perfection of taste and craft. The bazaars contained 1750 booths.

The Danube at Widdin is 2000 yards wide.

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Opposite is the Roumanian town Calafat. Between the two are four flat, uninhabited islands, one 22 miles long, with a deserted fortification, dating from Omar Pasha's time; the others small, mere mud-banks, all with rank vegetation. Bulrushes and shrubs throve there in entangled profusion, and waterfowl nested and bred prolifically, undisturbed by the Oriental Question. Both banks of the Danube, above and below, partake of the same characteristics, being flat, low, green, fertile. Calafat is situated on the spur of a range of hills. Widdin is built on the river mud, and stands, therefore, at a level of 100 to 150 feet below that of her neighbour across the road. Under favourable circumstances the Danube is navigable for small sea-going vessels up to Widdin, which was a stopping-place for the Austrian river-steamers. The river oversteps its bounds occasionally; there have been six disastrous floods during the current century.

The town lay for the Turks, and lies at the present day for the Bulgarians, in a peculiarly exposed position. The map almost gives the impression that Turkey was suspended from and attached to Europe, Christianity, and civilisation by the little tag of triangular territory, shaped thus by the course of the Danube, the natural boundary line of Bulgaria and Roumania. This

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tag, of which Widdin is the nail or pivot, cuts deep into the dominions of two possible, in 1877 certain, enemies: Servia in the west, Roumania in the north and east.

That this little territory was a tag in reality, and not only by its accidental position at the top of the map,—that Widdin was the nail, and a strong nail, which actually attached the crumbling country to the solidity of the West, was felt by Turkey, and hence in all the disposition of the seraskierat Widdin played a correspondingly important part. In 1787, 1806, 1812, 1828, 1853, 1876, and 1877 the town was a paramount consideration. It almost looked as if the corrupt wirepullers and sluggish wiseacres in Stamboul experienced the sensation that the gradual loosening of the nail and detaching of the tag impelled the rotten empire towards the bottomless pit of dismemberment, whence there was no rescuing.

In truth, the strategical importance of Widdin could not be overrated. It blocked one of the northern roads into the country; it commanded the highways to Sofia and to Rustchuk; it reigned supreme over the Danube. It was to be expected that the Turks, who were very good fortress-builders a century or two ago, would make the most of the position. And the most was such as the fortifications appeared in 1877, when they were

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about 200 years old, having been renovated, modernised, and augmented by Pasvan Oglu, by Hussein Pasha, and again during and shortly after the Crimean War.

On the water side there were terraces and batteries (fourteen of the latter, each of six heavy guns) of an imposing character. On the land side there were two concentric lines of fortifications, each semicircular in shape. The outer line, which enclosed the whole town and had a radius of nearly 1½ miles, consisted of an earth-wall 20 feet high, with several parallel ditches in front, 10 to 15 feet deep and 60 wide, broken by eleven redoubts, nine of which held a heavy battery each; the two end redoubts rested on the Danube, one on each side of the town, faced both ways, and had two batteries each, one looking riverward, the other landward. The northern was called Ghazi Bair Tabiya, the southern Emir Tabiya. The ditches and the broad belt of low-lying meadows in front of them could be flooded with river water by means of sluices, at a very short notice. Three to five hundred yards in front of the outer *enceinte* was a system of trenches—4 feet deep and 6 wide—for skirmishers, and a number of battery epaulments for guns of light calibre. In this wise no hostile battery could approach landward nearer than four miles from the centre of the town. In front of the trenches was a

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belt of swamps. The six roads leading to the town were raised so as to be above the level of the swamps and the flooded meadows, admitting of easy communication between the town and the most advanced outposts. The whole of the outer line was mud-built. The inner *enceinte*, which had a radius of about 1200 yards, was of a more formidable character, being composed of seven bastions, well built of stones and mould, and armed each with a heavy battery. Between the two lines were scattered suburbs and waste places full of rubbish, sometimes used for encampments. The inner line enclosed the town proper. There were no outworks, save one isolated heavy battery epaulment on the river bank, two miles above the town, called Yeni Tabiya (New Battery). The aggregate of the ordnance was about 500 pieces, a third of which were fine modern Krupp siege-guns, a third muzzle-loaders of very large type, the rest being Krupp guns of lighter calibre.

The greatest dimensions of the fortifications (inclusive of the flooded meadows and the outwork, but exclusive of the swamps) were, approximately: North-east to south-west, that is, along the Danube, six miles; north-west to south-east, that is, to the centre of the river front, three miles. Add to the extent of the fortress the facts, that it was well kept —better than most Turkish strongholds—and in

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thorough fighting condition; that it was heavily armed and efficiently manned; that it was equipped with huge stores and every modern device for offence and defence; that always the ablest men obtainable were chosen for the commandership, and it will be evident to the reader that Widdin was a formidable foe to tackle.[10]

Widdin's natural protection—besides the Danube—are the swamps and the flat, exposed marshy approaches which surround the town in a semi-circle, these being in their turn bordered by a concentric line of bare hills, rising to 300 feet above river level. In fact, the western approaches constituted Widdin's strength, and the town was generally admitted by experts to be far more vulnerable from the river than from the land side — the Turks thought it impregnable from the latter—strange as this may sound to lay readers. The average distance between the summit of the hills and the centre of the town is five miles. The hills are overgrown with arid grass, scrub, and thistles, but otherwise devoid of flora, save the wild flowers common to turf; the swamps generate a most beautiful and prolific vegetation,—flowers of gorgeous hues and countless varieties, among which a magnificent white lily is conspicuous by its abundance and its splendour. Strange to say, the cemeteries—both Christian and Mohammedan, the former well kept, the latter

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neglected — have been established on the marsh-land, and it is small wonder that the climate is unhealthy in the extreme, a malarian fever being very common. Dysentery and ague are also chronically rampant. There have been several epidemics of cholera in the district, and to my certain knowledge there were at least one instance of genuine plague and several cases of leprosy in 1877. The summer heat is intense; the winters are severe, bitter north winds predominating.

The country around Widdin is monotonous, the soil poor, the scenery unattractive, and in this respect the town is a disappointment to the traveller in the Peninsula who has seen the lovely surroundings of, say, Sofia, Berkovitza, Plevna, Lovdcha, Sistova, Kazanlik, and scores of other beautiful spots.

A book dealing with Bulgaria is bound to make mention of the tumuli so frequent in the country, which the best authorities acknowledge to be the mementos bequeathed by an extinct race of Pre-græcian aborigines. There are a good many on the hills around Widdin, and we used to find them convenient for planting our tents on. As the average reader will spurn me unless I eschew archæology, I shall not detain him with the mouldy epitaphs of a remote and undistinguished past, although a great German authority has extracted

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fifty quarto pages of copy out of the Bulgarian tumuli.

Six roads (so-called) radiated from Widdin, and each had its separate gate, there being in this wise six entrances in the double line of fortifications: Firstly (commencing north-east), to Flortin (9) *via* Kerimbey (3); secondly, to Flortin *via* Inova (4); thirdly, to Smerdan (4); fourthly, to Bregovo (17), Negotin (24), and Belgrad (130); fifthly, to Adlié (20), thence by the Vreska Chuka Pass to Saitchar (28); sixthly, to Artzar (13) and Lom Palankah (21), thence eastward to Rahova (45), Plevna (95), and Rustchuk (156), southwards to Berkovitza (54), and Sofia (100). It must be mentioned that the stage Artzar – Lom Palankah was but a footpath; the road proper led *via* Biélogradchik (30). The figures denote the distance in miles from Widdin as the crow flies. Only one of these roads deserved the name of a highway, that to Belgrad; it was wide, levelled, and paved in parts. This road entered the town by the Stamboul Kapu, the principal gate in the *enceinte*. The roads to Adlié and Artzar were good for Turkish roads, but would not have passed muster in England even as bridle-paths. The other three were mere tracks. For the Danube traffic there were five gates in the riverside fortifications, with landing-stages. Thus the town had a total of eleven gates.

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The telegraph connected Widdin—in times of peace—with Plevna (thence with Rustchuk), Sofia (thence with Constantinople), and Negotin (thence with Belgrad). The Widdin post-office was in charge of Austrian officials, and was well managed and honestly conducted. There were military post-offices in the two great permanent camps, and the wire connected them with headquarters in town.

Widdin was the capital of the pashalik (county) of the same name, which latter formed the north-western portion of the vilayet (province) of the Tuna (Danube). The Pashalik Widdin was sub-divided into seven sanjaks (districts): Widdin, Adlié, Biélogradchik, Berkovitza, Vratza, Lom Palankah, Rahova. The Tuna vilayet consisted of the following six pashaliks: Widdin, Tirnova, Rustchuk, Tultcha, Nish, and Sofia. Rustchuk was the capital of the vilayet.

Widdin had, in times of peace, Austrian, Russian, Servian, and Roumanian consulates. It was the seat of a Bulgarian archbishop, and the central station of the 7th Turkish Kol Ordu (Army Corps).

A characteristically Turkish town was Widdin in 1877. In other words, it presented a lovely exterior to the eye and an interior bitterly disappointing, chiefly to the nose.

Firstly and foremost, what a charming town

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was Widdin at a safe distance! Seen from the height of the hills, four to five miles away, with its white house fronts, its patches of dark green foliage, its towering castle, its thirty-three slender and graceful minarets, its twenty domes—breaking the monotony of house-tops and chimney-pots which is so fatal to the beauty of many a western city—with the blue waters of a majestic river embracing it, and the background of Roumania's green, fertile, sheep-studded plains, flooded with the spring sunlight, when the landscape had just drunk its fill in the heavy April showers, Widdin, such as I beheld it for the first time, presented a picture of surpassing loveliness.

Secondly, what a dirty, squalid, rickety, dilapidated town was Widdin! The streets were tortuous, narrow, dark, badly-paved, unlighted; the best, the Plevna Road—called by the Bulgarians Pleven Ulika, and appropriately nicknamed by the Turks Pilavna Oluk, the latter word meaning "gutter"—was but a dismal and sordid alley according to Western notion, although undoubtedly wonderfully picturesque. The town seemed to have no straight line in its constitution; everything was crooked and out of the horizontal, and most of the houses were decidedly out of the perpendicular, setting the laws of gravity at naught whithersoever the astonished tourist's eyes may

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have travelled. In fact, Widdin was tottering, like the empire to which it belonged. Fully one-half of the houses were in ruins; fully a fourth were unoccupied; many a clever and prosperous artificer lived in a hovel which in England would be considered unsanitary for a pig; and withal abounded the waste places full of rotting rubbish which have ever been a feature of urban Turkey.

Thirdly, what a noisy town was Widdin!—not the thunderous, stirring, almost heroically grand harmonies of a huge metropolis, where life is at fever-heat, and the thousand-and-one urban sounds are but the valves by which the high pressure of human existence escapes; but the shrill sounds of a pettifogging community, whose very idleness gives vent to idle noises. Widdin was like a cantankerous woman, so useless, paltry, disagreeable was its clamour. What a babel of tongues in the bazaars!—Turkish, Bulgarian, Roumanian, Servian, Greek, Circassian, Armenian, and German; the unwritten languages of the Gypsies, the Tsintsars, the Spanioles; the forcible but entirely uncultured Turkish of stalwart Pomakish renegades; the phonetical and grammatical atrocities perpetrated by rayahs compelled to speak the hated Moslem tongue in order to make themselves understood by the proud masters of the land; bad German mixed with worse Hungarian,

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Polish, Russian, Roumanian, and Hebrew; the beautifully pure Latin dialect (now, I fear, extinct) once spoken in Western Bulgaria by certain isolated communities of Roman descent, which have often and erroneously been taken for Roumanian or Tsintsarian settlements;[11] and, finally, a dozen nameless bastard blends of two or more of the idioms enumerated. And what a noisy set the people were, clamouring and gesticulating without reasonable cause, and with malice aforethought!—most of all the beggars with whom Widdin abounded. (I calculated that 1000 persons out of 13,000 lived habitually on beggary.) Add to this the yells and howls of the homeless dogs which wandered about in strong gangs to devour the offal, being the only scavengers that the town boasted of, and the agonising cries proceeding from open slaughter-houses conducted without a spark of feeling, and you are glad enough (as I was each time) to escape to the aristocratic calm and somnolence of the gun-spiked terraces at the river-side.

Fourthly, Widdin was essentially a town of insects. Never before have I beheld or *felt* so much vermin congregating in one place. Our mud huts in Plevna camp were bad enough, but they were abodes of peace and calm compared to a Widdin dwelling-house. Flies and bluebottles

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of astonishing pertinaciousness and greed; big, full-bodied, bloodthirsty fleas by the million; bugs, ants, lice, mosquitos, wasps, cockroaches, and black-beetles; all sorts and conditions of multipeds, European and Asiatic; swift-winged tormentors and nasty crawling things; little dots of mites and horned monsters a couple of inches long; scores of species never named, never classified, never dreamt of by our naturalists, each palsied house, each crazy hovel, each uncleanly, over-crowded room, each rotten board, each piece of furniture, and each native pariah—human, canine, or feline—was a breeding-place for teeming myriads. The bluebottles actually alighted on the spoons and forks as they were led to the mouth; horrible carrion-worms a foot long crawled about the streets in perfect security; and diseases generated by vermin were the rule rather than the exception. That rats and mice were comparatively scarce on account of the numerous scavenger dogs was hardly a compensation; for, I presume, I stand not alone in preferring an honest sewer rat—a foe whom you can tackle—to a horrible Bulgarian flea, which has no equal for cunning, speed, and voracity.

Fifthly, lastly, and most emphatically, Widdin stank. Heavens, how it stank! Of gutters serving as drains; of sewage, offal, and every

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description of dirt collected in the thoroughfares; of pools of blood and stagnant water; of dead dogs and dead cats; of undrained swamps; of insanitary slaughter-houses, cattle-sheds, sheep pens, and pig-styes; of reeking, crowded hovels; of narrow streets to which never a stray breath of wind erred; of waste spaces filled with rubbish never removed; of a multitude to whom cleanliness was an unknown virtue; of countless beggars in a shocking condition of filth and vermin, who preferred six months' hard labour to a cold bath; of hordes of canine mongrels in an awful state of mange, dirt, and parasites; of every conceivable kind of matter in the wrong place. When the sun shone mercilessly and the atmosphere was sultry the town was positively unbearable. Let the reader remember the worst stench that ever assailed his nose, let him add to it every bad odour that a most fervid imagination can conjure, let him multiply the aggregate by a hundred, and he will have a mild olfactory representation of the Virgin Fortress.

But the town was not without its redeeming features. Foremost we must count among them the pretty southern suburb, between the two lines of fortification, in which there dwelt the more prosperous part of the Christian community. Here the streets were fairly wide, straight, and clean,

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and the houses much like those of Greater London. Here were nicely laid out gardens, making a brave show of flowers; and here were tidiness, comfort, calm, and the tokens of tolerably successful and well-ordered lives.

And then the public buildings. Thirty-two mosques, some of them really fine edifices (notably the Pasvan Oglu Djami, the grandest, the Mustaffa Pasha Djami, the prettiest); a synagogue; a large unfinished and two small Bulgarian churches; a tiny Roman Catholic chapel; three Bulgarian schools with 600 pupils and only six (unpaid) teachers; the official residence of the Bulgarian archbishop; five Turkish elementary schools, a Mohammedan academy, and a library; the pasha's serai, a fine new edifice, and the old serai (Pasvan Oglu's), used in 1877 as a gratuitous dwelling by the many hangers-on and parasites of the pasha; two good hospitals, with a few foreign doctors (Austrians, Italians, Poles); an ice-factory for the gratis distribution of that cool commodity in summer-time (how much cannot England learn even from despised Turkey!); any number of drinking-fountains, some of them with fine sculptural work; and a clock-tower with a pretty carved *façade*, rearing a proud head above a sordid quarter of Tsintsarian hovels. Then there are the military establishments: the powder magazine;

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the steam factory at the river-side for the making of army biscuits of excellent quality; two barracks, for infantry and artillery; the Rushdié, or elementary military academy, with tiny cadets proudly parading a becoming uniform; the Observatory, erected as a compliment to the near and dear neighbour, Calafat; the vast store-houses; the engineers' separate establishment; the huge garrison mosque, called Ahmed Djami, after Ahmed Pasha, the victor of Chetaté in the Crimean War; the military hospital; the Museum of Arms, and the Bulgar castle, which last-named two edifices will presently have a special visit allotted to them.

Although private gardens abounded, there were no public parks in Widdin. But there was a pretty promenade on the river quay, overlooking on one side a small mooring-place for sea-going vessels, a larger for river-craft, a crude landing-stage for the steamers, and a special corner for the gunboats,[12] of which two were allotted to Widdin; on the other side some of the military buildings, and a hostelry kept by a Polish Jew, of the euphonious name Schlobberoboffskovitzki. This was the only place in the town which could boast of anything faintly resembling Western hotel accommodation; and the wily owner of the Hôtel de l'Europe demonstrated this to the disgusted wanderer by his charges and additions, the length

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and incomputability of which were in accordance with his name. There were in the town half-a-dozen khans (inns) as bad as any to be found in Turkey, and many Bulgarian wine-shops and Turkish *cafés*, all dirty, dismal, and dingy.

The reader will probably ask the pertinent question, What recreations had the luckless citizens of that fragrant town? To this I make answer, None. Theatres, "music halls," dancing saloons, institutions for the culture of art, literature, or science, did not exist. Political, municipal, and social life was in a chronic state of coma. Sports and pastimes were totally unknown quantities. In fact, there was nothing at all that could in any way contribute towards sociability.

Sometimes—rarely—a strolling company of Austrian players would float leisurely down the broad river on a chartered steamer, to perform before the Turkish grandees—the pasha, the kaimmakam (civil governor of a town), the commander of the garrison—and to give one or two public performances in a schoolroom. A Turkish Punch and Judy show, and itinerant Persian or Indian jugglers, caused occasionally a little diversion and much noise among the rabble. Sometimes a gypsy band came from one of the villages, and made the streets hideous with drums, cymbals, tin whistles, mandolins, and horribly scrapy fiddles, whilst dark-

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skinned, lithesome, slender maidens in scanty tatters, with eyes aflame of voluptuous passion, swung their shapely limbs in sensual rhythm, and nimble lads clad in woman's raiment gave suggestive exhibitions.

There were many pretty and well-dressed girls in the streets and bazaars of Widdin, mostly of the Jewish persuasion. The Bulgarians are not a good-looking race, to my way of thinking, and the Turkish women—who are among the handsomest of this globe, and I have seen them unveiled—go about with their faces half-covered. These gauze veils seemed to me an incongruity, side by side with the garments of Western cut and modern fashion which they affected out of doors. Prostitution was in 1877 quite unknown in Widdin.

The Turkish army had but very few bands, and these were generally in Constantinople. There had been none in Widdin for some years; the last used to perform on the quay for the public benefit and send all the vagrant curs a-howling and a-whining. Occasionally a zealous battalion commander of the garrison would mass the musical talent of his troop into an amateur orchestra, and request some luckless foreign resident to train it. When at length, after months of arduous drilling, they issued forth, proudly and ostentatiously,

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parading a motley collection of dilapidated brass, shrill reed, and blatant percussion (the latter outnumbering the former two, drowning melody and harmony in a continuous and indiscriminate crash-bang, with drum-roll thunder and triangular tinkling), making sad havoc of a Prussian quick-march or a Viennese *café chantant* ditty, the result was exhilarating, startling, even terrifying, but never of that character which a lying adage proclaims to soothe a savage breast. Then the priests attached to a mosque would complain of being disturbed in the repose necessary to religious contemplation, and the band would be wiped out of existence, with all the derision attached to the extinguishing of a public nuisance.

Social life was virtually non-existent in Widdin. The only event of that category which had occurred in the town within human memory was the fête given by Osman Pasha early in March 1877, to celebrate the peace with Servia—of which more in its proper place.

Almost every town owns one man with whose name that of the place is indelibly associated. Stratford claims Shakespeare; Bonn, Beethoven; Hamburg, Lessing; Weimar has Goethe and Schiller; Fleet Street, Doctor Johnson; St. Helena, Napoleon; Plevna, Osman Pasha; Sebastopol boasts of Todleben; Croydon, of Jabez Spencer

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Balfour; and Widdin, of Pasvan Oglu. The reader is already acquainted with this extraordinary man's exploits; suffice it to add that almost everything in the town (such as it appeared in 1877) reminded the observant wanderer of him. There was the mosque which he had built and named after himself; there were half-a-dozen drinking-fountains erected at his cost; there were streets, alleys, and bazaars laid out by him, or christened after him; the ice-factory was his creation, and in one of the cemeteries was his grave—a stone column surmounted by a representation of the old Turkish head-dress, now obsolete, the tulbend or turban. In another place close by was the grave of his inveterate foe, the Grand Vizier Hussein Pasha, and with a subtilty of sculptural cunning the artist—a Tsintsar—had given him a stone column crowned by an image of the new-fangled headgear which the other hated so much—the fez, which was so soon to wipe out the tulbend, and with it the janissaries.

Who laid down this street or erected that bazaar? Who built this very good public hospital? Who originated and endowed this free library and that college of law and divinity? Whose creation is this or that municipal institution? Who made such wise concessions to the despised rayahs? Who did such merciful things for the poor? Who built that powerful bastion and laid down yonder formid-

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able array of guns on the quay? Twenty more such questions could we ask without exhausting our subject. Answer to all: Pasvan Oglu, until the traveller, weary of the very name, is tempted to cry out—after the analogy of Mark Twain's innocent abroad, disgusted of having Michael Angelo flung into his face with every step of his foot and every glance of his eye in Italy—"Cut it short, save us both trouble, and say once for all: 'Who created the world?' 'Pasvan Oglu.'" In truth, if I, in 1877, seventy years after his death, had told a Turk of Widdin that it was Pasvan Oglu who caused the mighty river to wash the base of the gun-spiked quays, that it was he at whose command the nightingales sang so divinely in the leafy shadows of yonder lonely graveyard, and the flowers bloomed so luxuriously in the marshes without the city wall, I would have been believed—such a legend, such a symbol of all that is wise and good had the name become.

The words "the poor" cropped up just now. It must be mentioned, that the term when applied to Turkey signifies something different from the meaning we Westerns attach to it. There are in Turkey, as elsewhere, countless beggars and tramps who decline to work; but between them and the masses who earn a living wage there is nothing, whilst we in Christian Europe have the huge

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crowds who are willing and able to labour, but cannot find work, or not sufficient, for whom incompetent Governments and maladministration cannot even find bread, and those additional multitudes who work, but receive a pay too paltry to procure the barest necessaries. These are our poor; Turkey's poor are those who work and have the smallest competency as a wage. Islam, which is the most thorough-paced socialistic and democratic institution ever invented, has no aristocracy, and holds the balance in the social scale by having no *plebs*. These things are different now in Bulgaria since it has become autonomous and Christian. In Mohammedan countries Christianity is making no headway; if it should at any time become preponderant, it will undoubtedly introduce in its wake those great and blessed institutions: the sweater, the unemployed, an hereditary nobility, an urban rabble ever ready for any kind and amount of mischief, underpaid female labour, beer, whisky, prostitution, and starvation.

The Museum of Arms has been mentioned. This was a creation of Sami Pasha, the German-hater. The accommodation was atrocious—a few wooden sheds within the fort—the arrangement primitive and childish; but the contents would have made a desirable acquisition to the most boastful institution of that kind in Europe. Count-

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less mementos of the Austro-Turkish wars, in the shape of bronze cannon, muskets, swords, lances; the complete outfit of one of the extinct janissary ortas (regiments); the armament of the Ottoman forces in all stages; relics of the Roman and Bulgarian periods dug out of the soil, and of the aboriginal inhabitants, centuries prior to the Latin conquest; recollections of Pasvan Oglu and his enterprises; trophies of Islam's victories over Bulgarians, Servians, Greeks, Magyars, Austrians, and Germans; instruments of torture and execution; the weapons, tools, and properties of brigands and outlaws, the melancholy souvenirs of many a rayah rising, the arms and uniforms of Louis Kossuth's Hungarian volunteers — some 5000 objects (not counting the thousands of duplicates) in a dire jumble and among dismal surroundings, but wonderfully instructive, nevertheless.

Last, not least, we come to the most conspicuous and interesting among Widdin buildings — the castle, which bears a faint resemblance to the Tower of London minus its modern additions. The proximity of shipping contributes towards the likeness. It has already been said that its foundations date from the first Bulgarian supremacy, and are, therefore, nearly a thousand years old, and that in its construction the materials of various Roman strongholds were utilised. Several stones have Latin

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inscriptions; one states that here (in Remetodia?) was the garrison of LEG. I. ITAL. The more recent renovations and additions date probably from the time of Shisman, the first of the Bidyn czars, that is about 1300. The building has a lowering, darksome look; it is jail-like, formidable, solid, uncompromising, and flavours, in its very exterior, of horrors, bloodshed, and valiant deeds. Both by its aspect and its association it fills the spectator with awe and terror; and yet Widdin, as seen from without, would lose its greatest charm by the absence of the towering, gruesome, irregular mediæval castle.

It was in 1877 used exclusively for military purposes. There were housed in it vast accumulations of arms, ammunition, clothing, biscuits, and other stores. For purposes of defence it was, of course, useless, being pervious to modern artillery.

Having now seen all that is to be seen, we stroll down to the water's edge to feast our eyes, weary of dirt and crooked lines, on the blue waters and the broad sweep of the Danube.

The student—recovering from an overdose of Widdin—may wish to know something about the other towns of the pashalik. A little condensed information concerning these is embodied in the next chapter, which superficial readers are requested to skip.

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CHAPTER IV

EXTRA MUROS

Being a brief description of some of the towns in the pashalik Widdin, with a few remarks concerning the villages and waterways.

> "I find no place that does not breathe
> Some gracious memory."
>
> TENNYSON.

FLORTIN or Florentin (the Roman Florentiana), on the Danube, by road 9 miles due north of Widdin, by river 17 miles up-stream, had a population of 2000, mostly Bulgars and Wallachians. There used to be a ferry connecting the town with the Roumanian village Saltcha opposite. Flortin offered a convenient landing-place to a Roumanian invasion, and as such it received its due measure of consideration at the hands of the Turks, who had here a capital military observatory on the summit of a hill 700 feet high, close to the remains of a Roman fort. When I visited the town in 1877 it was a dirty, half-starved, God-forsaken hole.

Bregovo, on the Timok river, was the frontier

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town on the Belgrad highway. The road thither from Widdin, almost a straight line, 17 miles long, leads across a ridge of hills rising to nearly 500 feet above river-level, whence a magnificent view is obtained to all points of the compass; for this reason the highest served as a Turkish observatory. Bregovo counted less than 1000 inhabitants, mostly Servians and Roumanians—the latter of whom owned a fine church—and had no importance except as a frontier station. It was a pretty and prosperous place, but sadly deficient in vitality.

Adlié or Kula marked the Turkish end of the Vreska Chuka Pass (or Passo Augusto), leading across the Servian Balkan to Saitchar. The distance Widdin–Adlié by road is 21 miles, Adlié–Saitchar 13 miles. Adlié had a population of 3000, Bulgarians and Servians, and had some remarkable Roman ruins, and a strong fort occupied permanently by part of the Widdin garrison. The Vreska Chuka Pass—the scene of the disastrous Austrian defeat in 1737—was, for a Balkan crossing, commodious and well kept, its highest elevation being 2200 feet.

Biélogradchik or Belgradchik (the Roman Combustica?), 30 miles south of Widdin, was the crossing-point of four important roads: one by the Kadi Bogas Pass to Kniajevatz in Servia, the second

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by the S. Nikolas Pass to the then Turkish, now Servian town Isvor (Timacus?), the third to Lom Palankah, the fourth to Widdin. Both the passes mentioned were mere tracks, practicable only in perfect weather; the former had a highest elevation of 3980, the latter one of 4450 feet. Biélogradchik was a thriving little town of 2000 souls, mostly Turks, beautifully situated at the foot of the Balkans. It was an isolated Mohammedan colony in a district exclusively Christian. It owned a strong fort.

Berkovitza, in a straight line 54 miles from Widdin, had—incredible as this may seem—in 1877 no direct communication with that town, not even a track. The road—which I had to tramp—led *via* Biélogradchik and Lom Palankah, being nearly 100 miles long. Berkovitza is the northern end-point of two passes across the Stara Planina: the Kom Pass, a mere footpath (6300 feet) to Pirot (Romesiana?) and Nish (Naissus), both Turkish in 1877, and now Servian; the Ghintzi Pass, a good road (4800 feet) to Sofia (Sardica). Berkovitza was thus a point of some importance, being the half-way stage between Sofia and Widdin. It was, for a Turkish provincial town, large and populous, having 7000 to 8000 inhabitants—Turks, Bulgars, and Spanioles. Its mountainous surroundings are wild and grand.

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Lom Palankah (Almus), prettily situated where the River Lom flows into the Danube, was—next to Widdin—the most important town of the pashalik. It had 5000 inhabitants, among them a rich community of Frankish Jews and many wealthy Bulgars, was well fortified and garrisoned by several battalions, and was an interesting, thriving, and picturesque place. The Lom Palankah filigree industry was, and is, famous; connoisseurs used to consider the Lom craftsmen even superior in taste and skill to their competitors in Widdin, and that is surely the highest praise that can be bestowed upon them. Lom had no direct road communication with Widdin (what a state of things for the nineteenth century!), but there was a foot-path along the river to Artzar. The town is well worth a visit, and was—even as I saw it in 1877—a spot where I, for one, would be content to pitch a permanent residence—and that is a good deal to say of any Turkish town. Its climate is far better than that of Widdin; its inhabitants were more prosperous, more advanced in culture, more tolerant towards each other, more sociable, and less gruff to strangers. It had a chamber of commerce, a well-laid out little harbour, a branch office of the Austrian Steamship Company (whose craft touched here), an Austrian vice-consul, a fine synagogue and a Jewish seminary, an advanced

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Bulgarian college (the best of the empire), a good deal of social life and even unsectarian and non-racial intercommunication, and—the greatest of all miracles!—a crude system of drainage and sewage. It smelt sweetly, battled right royally with vermin, and was altogether an attractive and rising little place, once the favourite child of Midhat Pasha, who, with his wonderful gift of mental far-sight, descried its mighty possibilities.

Artzar or Archar (Ratiaria) on the Danube is 15 miles below Widdin, and barely 20 above Lom Palankah; but what a contrast to the latter!—a squalid, dead-alive, poverty-stricken place, built on an evil-smelling swamp, surrounded by sterile downs—that sort of place in which you would spurn even to dig your grave. And this was the once famous and mighty capital of the province! It counted less than 1000 souls. In its vicinity there was a colony of troglodytes.[18] It was fortified with one redoubt and a heavy battery; hence it was habitually honoured by the Turks with the grandiloquent name Artzar Palankah, the latter word meaning "fortress."

The villages and hamlets in the vicinity of Widdin are given here with their distances in miles from the centre of the town, in straight lines, for the benefit of any reader of an inquiring mind:

Up-river: Shekselo (4), Katova (4½), Koshava (8).

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North: Kerimbey (3), Kapitanovtzé (3½), Negonanita (7).

North-west: Inova (4), Smerdan (4), Rayanovtzé (4), Halvagi (6).

West: Novoselo (2), Ali Bey (3), Ruptza (4), Musulman (5), Belerada (5).

South-west: Tatardjik (4).

Down-river: Vidbol (5), Nazir Mahalla (6).

The nomenclature of Kapitanovtzé and Rayanovtzé indicates that here the Wallachian element predominated. Ali Bey was a small Turkish settlement clustered around a windmill. The others were Bulgarian villages, with settlements of Gypsies and Circassians, but devoid of Turks. There were no Jews in any of the villages.

One word as to the waterways in this district. The Danube, ranking foremost, is wide and majestic, rich in fish, deep, treacherous in certain winds, with a strong current, habitually agitated waters, and attractive, fertile banks. The Delenska and the Topolovitza, already mentioned—tributaries which flow into the parent river just above Widdin, uniting before they do so—are mere brooks; we used to find their waters pure and refreshing, and their net-caught sprat tasty. The Timok, which forms the boundary between Servia and Bulgaria to-day, and parted Servia and Turkey up to 1878, is a river of some pretensions, being

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navigable for small craft; where it joins the Danube there stands the village Rakovitza, the most northerly of Bulgaria's, erstwhile of Turkey's, possessions. The Lom flows through very pretty country, and is particularly rich in fish; its junction with the Danube forms the little harbour of Lom Palankah.

It is easy enough to enumerate the dark spots of Widdin or any other Turkish pashalik; and when a light side to the picture is descried it ought to be made much of. There are two features which should be mentioned as contrasting the district favourably to other parts of the Sultan's domains: firstly, brigandage, up to quite recent times (1885, when the last band was exterminated in the Rhodopé) the curse of Bulgaria, never existed in the north-western portion of the Tuna vilayet; secondly, the pashalik was almost free from the horrible vice peculiar to the East, the black stain on Turkish social life.

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CHAPTER V

THE NEIGHBOUR ACROSS THE ROAD

Being a brief introduction to Calafat.

"Let her great Danube, rolling fair,
Enwind her isles."

TENNYSON.

SINCE Widdin and Calafat are so closely associated in history I cannot conclude the topographical part of my subject without telling my readers something about our near and dear neighbour.

Let us imagine, then, that we are on good terms with our *vis-à-vis*, that the vassal has not rebelled against the liege,—that, in short, Roumania has not announced herself to be in a state of hostility towards the Porte. We select two sturdy, brown-faced, bright-eyed, bare-legged fellows in tatters from among the many clamouring boatmen, who, to a monotonous chant, row us leisurely across the beautiful and imposing river. Having brought our craft safely alongside Calafat's primitive landing-stage, we climb the rotten and slippery steps and

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look about, astonished to find ourselves in Europe and the nineteenth century after having left the Orient and the Middle Ages but an hour ago.

Calafat, the blood-stained and much contested, is a pleasant little town, not fortified in 1877, and had then 3000 inhabitants. Its principal street, of modern European aspect, leads from the river up the slope of the hill, whose summit is crowned by a pretty chapel. The high-toned, lazy notes of its bell used to be wafted across the river by favourable winds, and many a Widdin citizen set his watch by it in preference to the unreliable statements on the dial of the clock-tower. The landing-stage at the bottom of the street was a stopping-place for the Danube steamers.

Calafat is quite a modern town, dating practically since 1856; for the squalid, though large village of that name, which Omar Pasha's forces defended so bravely, and on the site of which the town stands, has entirely disappeared. The origin of the Wallachian village, Calafat, is lost in obscurity, but I do not think it can have been more than 100 years old. When Clerfayt stormed it in 1790 it was but a diminutive hamlet, quite unimportant in itself, and fortified only by reason of being the bridge-head of Widdin. The name does not appear in such accounts of Khevenhüller's campaign in 1737 as I have consulted.

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In commerce Calafat was dwarfed by its overbearing neighbour, and industry it had not (in 1877). Roumanian grain was exported, and there were some fisheries, for the Danube is wonderfully wealthy. Three or four times a year there was a feeble little market—much derided by the citizens of Widdin,—when the sheep and oxen of the rich Wallachian plains were brought together, with hay, straw, corn, fruit, and vegetables; and the Jews utilised those momentous occurrences by hawking old clothes and indecent photographs. But since 1878 the town has made rapid strides and bids fair to become a commercial emporium.

A wonderfully picturesque and high-flavoured fellow is your Roumanian Jew, and a very devil in cunning. He is undoubtedly the best hated man in Christendom. Not even in Austria and Russia,—those countries *par excellence* for Jew-baiting,—not even in Germany during the time of the *Judenhetze*, was the Israelite held in such execration as in Roumania when I was a prisoner-of-war in Bukarest. Small wonder, for the country was virtually in his hands. It was the rule rather than the exception for a farmer to mortgage his crop when it was barely sown. Nine peasants out of ten could hardly call bodies and souls their own—their all had been abandoned to the wily Hebrew. Many a pretty Roumanian girl had to be relinquished to a clam-

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ouring Jewish creditor, to find her way ultimately into a Turkish harem.

What obtains in an individual holds good in a nation. "He has fallen into the hands of the Jews" means that his case is hopeless—he is doomed. A person, a tribe, a town, a country—it is all the same.

"He has fallen into the hands of the Jews." Know ye, sons of the chosen people, that the lowest depths of infamy and degradation to which man of woman born can sink is to fall into your hands? Is this the intent and purpose of the life of your race on this globe, or is it a mere accident thereof? Since the human species is undoubtedly deteriorating—morally, physically, materially, in every respect save the intellectual—it is to be presumed that ultimately all mankind will be "in the hands of the Jews." Is this the goal you are striving for, or is it a benefit which offers itself and which you reap because you cannot help it, a flower which you pluck by the way in your onward path of conquest?

To return to Christian Calafat. It presented a striking contrast to Widdin, being sober, quiet, modern, plain and clean, whereas the other was gay, noisy, antique, picturesque, and dirty; the former monotonous and typically European, the latter many-hued and typically Oriental. In fact, the two

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towns, separated only by the width of a river, may be said to have represented the West and the East in their most pronounced forms; and the strangest freak in the situation is that by location Calafat is the Eastern and Widdin the Western.

As may be imagined, there was no communication, no traffic, no intercourse between the two places early in 1877. Omar Pasha's pontoon bridge had long since been destroyed, and an attempt to run a steam-ferry had ended in inglorious bankruptcy. Any one wishing to go across had to hire a private boat.

Calafat is not exactly opposite to Widdin, but lies nearly two miles up-stream, over against Yeni Tabiya. The distance between the castle of Widdin and the chapel of Calafat is three miles.

The south-western corner of Roumania is very sparsely populated. Calafat is the only place of any importance in that quarter. The nearest larger town, Crayova, which has 15,000 inhabitants, is 50 miles to the north-east. There are not even any hamlets or villages in the neighbourhood, a striking contrast to Widdin with its half-wreath of many settlements. A few fishermen's huts, clustered around a deserted Turkish watch-tower, three miles from Calafat down-stream, called Calau or Carau (derived, probably, from the Bulgarian word Caraul, guardhouse), was in 1877 the only group of human

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habitations within a semicircle of seven miles radius of which Calafat was the centre. Calau stood exactly opposite Emir Tabiya, the southernmost redoubt of Widdin's outer *enceinte*.

Two roads proceed from Calafat: one (a good highroad) *via* Golentzé (12) to Boyeleshti (22), whence a northern branch (the principal) forks off to Crayova (50), whilst the southern (a mere track) leads *via* Caracal (75) to Bukarest (160); the other (a bridle-path) to Poyana (8), a village south-east of the town, where in 1877 the track ended. There was also a footpath to Chiupercheni (7), a hamlet to the south-west, and another along the river to Calau aforesaid. The distances from Calafat in miles and straight lines are appended to the names in parentheses. There was neither a down-river nor an up-river road—an omission which does not reflect much credit on Roumanian enterprise, finances, or strategical foresight. The same remark applies to the lack of road communication between Calafat and the capital, for the stretch Boyeleshti–Caracal was only a fair-weather track. The Poyana path, prolonged to a spot opposite Lom Palankah, and thence conducted along the river to Piket (55), where the Shiul flows into the Danube, opposite Rahova, could have placed Calafat in direct communication, by an almost straight road, of the utmost strategical

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importance, with Corabia (80), Turnu Magurele (100), Simnitza (125), and Giurgevo (155). The reader will bear this omission in mind, which—so he will find—was a grave drawback to Roumanian operations in 1877.

On the Danube, nine miles upwards of Calafat, is the large village Chetaté, which played an important rôle in the year of war 1854. A track connected Chetaté with Golentzé; but there was no communication, not even a path, between Chetaté and Calafat.[14]

This part of Roumania is distinguished by innumerable small lakes and swamps. Down-river the latter assume rather formidable proportions, as a look at the map will show. Whatever evil influence these stagnant waters may have on the climate, they are an undeniably attractive addition to the landscape. Many a time, as I gazed upon the fertile, sunlit plain from the battery epaulments of Widdin's river-terraces, the lakes —of which two were visible from that stand-point—reminded me forcibly of blue eyes in a placid face. And many a time have I thought, "What a pity and a shame it is that this beautiful land should be almost depopulated, with its vast resources undeveloped and its rich possibilities slumbering, when the much-vaunted civilisation—as exemplified by greedy office-seekers and pro-

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fessional politicians — of the crowded countries towards the setting sun cannot even find bread for hundred thousands of their children!" But then Roumania was sucked dry by the Jews and eaten up by militarism.

Having refreshed ourselves in a pleasant arbour outside a little wine-shop in Calafat's principal street, we enter our gaily painted craft and return to Widdin, to partake of Danube sprats, boiled rice, a bottle of the light red wine of the country, some excellent coffee, and a glass of Slivovitz, or Servian plum-brandy, in Mr. Schlobberoboffskovitzki's dingy dining-room, with its pretty river view, so as to fortify ourselves for a severe course of history.

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CHAPTER VI

METAMORPHOSIS

Being a veracious and unvarnished account of the remarkable transformation of Michael Lattas.

"A city clerk, but gently born and bred."
TENNYSON.

IN the years 1829 to 1834, during the pashalik of the Grand Vizier Hussein, there lived in Widdin an obscure personage who was known as Omar Effendi, and who earned a precarious living as clerk to the pasha aforesaid, with which despised office he combined the even humbler of teacher to his master's children in the rudiments of history and geography, and in an elementary knowledge of Italian and German. He made a little "overtime" (not much, for the grim exterminator of the janissaries was a hard task-master) by writing the epistles of illiterate persons.

An odd man was this Omar Effendi, taciturn, evasive, gruff, uncouth, and always in pecuniary

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difficulties. That he was a foreigner was generally suspected—in fact, he was far too well educated for an Osmanli. He spoke Turkish like a native and without the trace of an accent; he knew the tongue of the despised rayahs and commanded several Western idioms. To all appearances he was a Mussulman: he worshipped regularly in the orthodox fashion, he kept the fasts, and the muezzin never called him in vain to prayers at the break and the close of day. But whence he hailed and what was his real name was known only to him and to his master, who honoured his confidence. He had no friends, and seemingly desired none; he was not married, and seemingly desired not to be; he never spoke of the past, and apparently never planned for the future; he lived for himself and within himself; books were his only companions—chronicles of wars and records of great deeds. Pasvan Oglu's public library he had ransacked, furnished with his master's permit; not finding much there save perverse Moslem law and hair-splitting divinity, and the inflated bombast which in Turkey passes current as history, he obtained, by hook or crook, foreign works from the rich Greek, Armenian, and Austrian traders—begged, borrowed, or stole, but never bought them, and that is no accusation of thieving; for books, umbrellas, and income-tax are outside the pale

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of common honesty. He was a zealous servant and an efficient teacher, but that was really all that could be said in his favour; and these qualities had not their origin in an inborn sense of duty or gratitude, but were merely part of a certain great scheme of his. Altogether a very mysterious young man, suspected and shunned, but giving the intelligent observer—there were not many in Widdin, and Hussein was not among them—the impression of stupendous latent power. That the threadbare quill-driver was repressing himself, was lying in wait, was working and watching for a turn of events with an indomitable directness of purpose, and could rise grandly to the occasion, entered not the thick skulls of Widdin officialdom.

Had the good citizens known his antecedents he would have been even more suspected, despised, avoided, forsaken; for he was an alien, an enemy, a deserter, an unbeliever, a renegade. Had any oracle predicted that a quarter of a century later he would set the world aflame, and stamp the records of history indelibly with his self-chosen name, they would have looked upon the prophet as fit only for the madhouse. Yet was he destined to be one of the most famous generals Turkey has ever owned. Kindly reader, you will please to mark this man.

Michael Lattas was born in 1806, in Plaski,

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a frontier townlet of Croatia, was therefore an Austrian subject. By descent he was a Slav, by creed a Christian. His father held a Government appointment. Michael embraced the military profession at an early age, entering (1822) as cadet the Croatian infantry regiment Ogulin, which furnished Austria's boundary-guard against Turkey. In 1827 he obtained a lieutenant's commission, but already in the next year he deserted, some say in fear of punishment for an offence committed by himself, others say in shame of an offence committed by his father. The latter alternative I decry as improbable, since Michael Lattas had no shame in his conception. He crossed the Turkish frontier by stealth and made his way afoot to Widdin, as scores of Austrian fugitives had done before him. Here he promptly learnt Turkish, embraced Islam, adopted the name of Omar, and was employed (1829) as scribe by Hussein Pasha, with whom he stayed for five years of servitude and hard labour. In 1834 he had a dispute with his master—provoked by the cunning clerk—anent the repayment of advanced money. Notwithstanding bickerings and mutual recrimination, Hussein, who had a keen sense of justice and fairness, could not decline to give him excellent testimonials and a letter of recommendation to the seraskierat in Stamboul. Probably the stern, resolute pasha

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thought that epistle and certificates were thrown away on a fellow who could not say "Bo" to a goose, and whose only proper sphere was reed-pen drudgery.

Omar left Widdin (1834), hurriedly, stealthily, ingloriously, to clamouring creditors' bitter disappointment. He partly tramped, partly worked his way as a carter, to Constantinople, the goal of his ambition, his Eldorado, where he promptly found clerkly employment in the seraskierat. In the latter he made himself agreeable to a pasha; scrupulousness and remorse being unknown quantities to him, he may not have been over-particular in the choice of his means. The pasha drew the attention of the Sultan to the quiet, clever, plodding man, and Mahmoud II. appointed him teacher of writing—Omar had become a past-master of Arabic caligraphy—to his thirteen year old son, afterwards Sultan Abdul Mejid, with which office was connected the honorary rank of captain in the Turkish army. Omar knew to make himself liked by both the actual and the coming Sultan; in fact, over the latter he gained complete mastership. Excepting one brief spell of imperial disfavour, the goodwill of his various sovereigns remained with him until his death, notwithstanding his grave faults and his many compromising actions. His rise was rapid. When Abdul Mejid's penman-

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ship was considered ripe, Omar exchanged the reed for the sword (1837) and entered active service. Being a man who could accommodate himself to all circumstances he was soon at home in his new profession. He was promoted to major's rank in 1838, and later in the same year he became lieutenant-colonel. In 1839 he received his fire-baptism by taking part in the, for the Turks, disastrous battle of Nissib in Syria against the Egyptians.[15] In the same year his protector, Mahmoud II., died. But in the son, Sultan Abdul Mejid, seventeen years old, the renegade had an even more benevolent master. The change of succession brought him the rank of colonel. In supreme command of an isolated detachment he inflicted a crushing defeat upon the enemy at Beksaya (Syria, 1839). For this exploit he was made general of brigade, and henceforth the ball was rolling at his feet. In 1842 he was appointed military governor of the Lebanon, where the people were in rebellion, but was recalled after a few months on account of his cruelty. For the meek scribe had developed into a very devil in his total lack of mercy and pity, and his former co-religionists were the object of his particular hatred. But so good a soldier no Government could afford to keep idle. In 1843 Omar took part in the campaign in Albania

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against the insurgent Djuleka, whom he captured. In 1846 he received the supreme command against the rebellious Kurds, whom he subdued and punished with the utmost rigour. One of their chiefs, Iskendjer, Prince of Aslom, was taken prisoner and exiled to Widdin; the reader will kindly make a note of this name. In 1848 the inhabitants of Roumania were seized by the fever of insurrection, and Omar was appointed military governor of Wallachia and Moldavia, with his seat in Bukarest; the Principalities were occupied simultaneously by Russian and Turkish troops, and tranquillity was restored. In 1850 Bosnia caught the rebelling complaint, and Omar was promptly despatched thither as commander of the local army. He stormed and conquered the frontier fortress Bihach—then one of Turkey's strongest places, situated barely thirty miles from his native town—and "quieted" the country in his peculiar and amiable fashion. For this deed he was—at his own petition—appointed commander, with the rank of general of division, of the army about to operate against Montenegro. In December 1852 he commenced his campaign, but already in the next month he was compelled to move his corps away, since Austria had complained of the proximity of his troops and their frequent boundary transgressions. When war with Russia

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became imminent (October 1853), Omar was made mushir (marshal) and commander-in-chief of the Ottoman forces in Europe, and set out forthwith for Widdin to assume the supreme leadership.

This is the true story of the transformation of Michael Lattas, Croatian deserter, *via* the intermediary stages of Omar Effendi, scribe and absconding debtor, Captain Omar, teacher of writing to the imperial family, and Colonel Omar Bey, victor of Beksaya, to the goal of Omar Pasha, commander-in-chief of the Ottoman army during the Crimean War.

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CHAPTER VII

THE RENEGADE OF WIDDIN

Being an account of the bellicose events around Widdin and Calafat during the Crimean War.

1853 to 1856.

"Lions war and battle for their dens."
SHAKESPEARE.

ON the 17th October 1853, nearly twenty years after Omar Effendi, literary hack and all-round drudge, had sneaked out of the Pilavna Kapu like a thief, the Mushir Omar Pasha made his state entry by the same gate, with pride, pomp, and circumstance, surrounded by a brilliant staff, escorted by a gallant cavalcade, acclaimed by the populace, greeted by the *selam dur* (present arms!) of Turkey's best battalions. An hour after his arrival he went to pray, ostentatiously, at the grave of his former master and the founder of his fortune, Hussein Pasha, now dead six years; and towards dusk on the same day a brigade with several batteries occupied the large island situated between Widdin and

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Calafat, roughly fortified it, and pitched camp there.

The die was cast, and it was the once-despised Omar who had boldly thrown it. The war had broken out which, from a purely Oriental (between Russia and Turkey, the ninth of that ilk), was so soon to develop into a European of huge dimensions, unequalled rigour, and tremendous consequences—into the Crimean War.

Russia had not complied with Turkey's reasonable and moderate demand for the evacuation of the Danube Principalities, at that time the latter's undisputed property, and the high-handed Omar, who had addressed a solicitation to that effect to Prince Gortchakoff, the Russian commander, had anticipated by six days the grace which the Sultan had accorded to the Czar.

The Turks had taken the precaution to concentrate a large corps (20,000 men with 40 guns, not counting the stationary ordnance and 5000 irregular horsemen) in and around Widdin during September and October. The Russian detachment destined to operate in this quarter was commanded by General Fischbach, consisted of one division (12 battalions), with its complement of cavalry and artillery—total, 11,000 men and 16 guns—and was, at the commencement of hostilities, still quartered, with the bulk of the Russian forces, in

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and near Bukarest, whence it sallied forth on the 25th October towards Crayova.

At that time Calafat was rather a strong place. It had a complete semicircle of redoubts, trenches, and ditches flooded with Danube water, many of which dated from the campaign of 1790, when the Austrians had stormed and captured them. A pontoon bridge connected the place (then a village, but both more extended and more populous as a village than to-day as a town, counting some 4000 inhabitants) with the large Danube island; another, between the latter and Widdin, provided with a closable aperture for passing vessels, completed the communication. The total length of the two bridges was 2200 yards, that of the communication from shore to shore was close on 3000 yards. The Roumanian bridge-head was situate three miles south of the present site of the town, but well within the Calafat fortification; the Turkish lay within Widdin's inner *enceinte*.

Pasha of Widdin was, throughout the war, Sami, the German-hater, the ardent advocate and promoter of an alliance with England and France.

On the 23rd October the respite elapsed and the Sultan's decree of war became absolute. Four days later the General of Division, Ismael Pasha, hitherto commander of the Widdin garrison, but now subject to Omar, and to the latter's adjutant, friend, and

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factotum, Ahmed Pasha, crossed over to Calafat with 12 battalions and some artillery, and on the morrow the Turks were in full and undisputed possession of the town, which, well equipped and fortified, strongly armed and manned, and ably commanded, was to give the ruthless invader such an amount of trouble as nobody in Europe had foreseen or suspected. A day later Omar took up his residence in Calafat, but Widdin continued to be the base and centre of operations, the *vis-à-vis* being merely the fortified bridge-head of the larger town. Ceaselessly Omar and Ahmed added to and strengthened the defences of Calafat, having in their service several trained Austrian and Polish engineers.

"If the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain," thought the restless Omar. The enemy seemed inclined to allow him undisturbed possession of the dirty Wallachian village; so he went forth to seek and beat him.

Leaving Ahmed in command of Calafat, he travelled post-haste to Turtukai, a fortified little town on the Danube, half-way between Rustchuk and Silistria, where Ismael Pasha—not the Widdin man of that name—was his lieutenant. He arrived on the 2nd November, and on the same day he caused a force of 3000 men to cross over to

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Oltenitza, a Wallachian townlet situate near the spot where the River Arjish flows into the Danube, 180 miles due east of Calafat. Here he was attacked on the 4th November, and gained a decided victory. A large Russian force stood at Budesci, 15 miles higher up on the same river, and 20 miles south-east of Bukarest, the enemy's head-quarters; but it was set in motion only after the battle of Oltenitza had been fought and lost to the invader.

This, the earliest noteworthy action of the Crimean War, was all the more brilliant a victory for the Turkish leader, as this was the first time that he had encountered trained European troops. Completely did he vindicate his sovereign's choice. "Is a man—and an alien—a fit person to be our commander-in-chief in a European war, who has never faced any foe but dirty Christian dogs and rebels, although in this branch—we cannot deny it—his experience is probably unique in history?" This question many befezzed wiseacres had asked, with shrugging shoulders and in grave perturbation of Moslem mind; and the echo of the battle of Oltenitza thundered the answer over the wise Padisha's dominions.

After all, the supreme art of kingship consists in finding, at the right moment, the right man for the right place; and that Abdul Mejid had

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done, and done well, in his choice of Omar Pasha as director of operations on this side of the Hellespont.

The battle of Oltenitza made a great stir in Europe, and caused many foreigners, principally Germans, Austrians, and Poles, to offer their services to the suddenly famous victor.

The action had been for the Turks mainly a defensive one. They had dug a few entrenchments on the day of taking possession, and these the Russians, commanded by General Pavloff,[16] assailed repeatedly. But, supported by the heavy guns of Turtukai, the Turks repelled all attacks, both sides fighting with conspicuous bravery, and in the end the Russians had to retreat to Budesci, with a loss of 1200 in killed and wounded, out of a force of 7000, whilst the Turkish casualties amounted only to a few hundred of a defending troop of 3000.

Hearing that a strong Russian force, considerably outnumbering his own, was approaching from Budesci, Omar, having made the enemy feel the heaviness of his hand and given him a foretaste of what he was to expect, evacuated Oltenitza (14th November) and retreated to Turtukai, where his troops dug themselves into the ground, as the Turks invariably and instinctively do when threatened with an attack. This done, Omar, leaving Ismael in command of Turtukai, returned to Calafat.

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Here, during November and December, more troops were concentrated, and with the New Year Omar counted on this spot 25,000 regulars, 10,000 irregular cavalry, and 50 field-guns. The defences of Calafat, having been extended to a semicircle with a radius of over three miles, had been strengthened in such a manner that the town, supported as it was by Widdin with its heavy ordnance and huge stores, was practically impregnable. And such the Russians found it, when, at the reiterated command of their exasperated Czar, they made that series of futile attempts on the place, extending over a period of nearly five months, which is known to history by the somewhat misleading name of the Siege of Calafat. It was inaugurated by the battle of Chetaté, a remarkable event, the details of which deserve to be placed on record.

On the 5th January 1854 General Anrep,[17] who had under him two divisions (one of them General Fischbach's), that is, 23,000 men, with 48 guns, concentrated in Crayova, occupied with a brigade Chetaté, the Danube village, nine miles above Calafat, already mentioned in a previous chapter. On the following day he was attacked and suffered a disastrous defeat.

Hardly ever has action exhibited greater bravery of either combatant. As if conscious that the eyes of Europe were upon them—which indeed they

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were—both sides fought ferociously, and the result was simply murderous. The Turks were led by Ahmed Pasha, a Vienna-trained man, and the Ismael Pasha already mentioned; with the latter were a number of renegades, among whom the Poles—Constantine von Jacoubowski (Yakub Bey) and Count Alexander Illinski (Iskender Bey)—were conspicuous by their impetuosity. The Russians lost 3000 men, the Turks 1000 in killed and wounded (or 4000 out of an engaged total of barely 12,000); and the action resulted in the retreat of the former and the occupation of Chetaté by the latter. On the 7th, 8th, and 9th January there was again heavy fighting in this quarter, the Russians having received strong reinforcements from Crayova, but the Turks remained victorious.

This is the outline of the four days' fighting at Chetaté, which roused Europe at the time to such a pitch of excitement and enthusiasm. But owing to the total lack of impartial onlookers in this quarter, the versions which reached the newspaper public were garbled and exaggerated; even to this day the historians give each other the lie direct. I cannot do better than record the details of the action as I collected them on the spot. I had speech in 1877 with many citizens of Widdin who were old enough to remember the events of twenty-three years ago. This is in substance the

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account which I gathered as the harvest of my investigations:—

It was late at night on the 5th January when the outposts of irregular cavalry brought into Calafat, *ventre-à-terre*, the astounding and wholly unexpected news of the Russian occupation of Chetaté. Omar, who happened to be in Calafat, called at once a meeting of his superior officers (Sami, the pasha of Widdin, and himself a very good soldier; Ahmed Pasha, commander of Calafat; Ismael Pasha, commander of the Danube islands; Halim Pasha, commander of Widdin; the Poles, Yakub Bey and Iskender Bey; the Circassian Ishmahil, leader of the irregular cavalry; the Austrian engineers Holzwege and Teutsch; an English adventurer named Morris, at that time a conspicuous character in Widdin, who was supposed to be a deserter from the British army, and who proved himself to be a very clever artilleryman; and the Kurd warrior and prisoner Iskendjer, who asked, and was allowed, to take part in the fighting), and an expedition for the early morrow was decided upon.

This was twofold. A force of 1000, mostly regular infantry, with a few guns of light calibre, set out from Widdin before the 6th January had dawned, in craft which the far-seeing mushir had caused to be got ready some time before,

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equipped with oars and Danube experts in the persons of local fishermen. There were some fifty of these boats and barges, and they rowed slowly up-stream in the cold gray dawn of a bitter winter day. An hour later—in time to keep tryst with the river-force—three battalions of infantry, 2000 irregular cavalry, and three field batteries of six guns each, started from Calafat along the river meadows. The appointment was admirably kept. Hardly had the river-force commenced to attack and engage the Russians on that side when the land-force assailed impetuously on the other. The former was led by Ismael Pasha; the latter by Ahmed Pasha, who was also commander-in-chief of the undertaking, and thus deserves to pose as victor of Chetaté. With him were Ishmahil and his Circassians and other mounted irregulars, and the eager and arduous Poles, who commanded a detachment of volunteers of their own nationality. The Russian force in possession, consisting of six battalions, six squadrons, and sixteen guns, was taken completely by surprise; in fact, most of the men were still resting in the houses after the fatigue of the previous day's exhausting march from Crayova, when Ismael's men landed and made their first assault. Omar himself followed with a strong reserve force of regular horsemen. But this was never brought into action, as the village was carried

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almost at the first onslaught, although the resistance was so desperate that this lasted for several hours. A large pond and some swamps protected the land-front of the Russian position; these were successfully circumvented. The populous village consisted of a single street a mile long, both ends of which the Russians had hastily barricaded and entrenched the evening before. It was attacked simultaneously from either side. Each house, hovel, and shed was converted into a fortress and bravely defended; each foot of ground was fought for. In the first hour of the afternoon the action was over, and the surviving Russians retreated hurriedly across country, north-eastward, leaving two guns in the hands of the victorious Osmanlis, and nearly half of their force, dead or dying, on the ground and in the burning houses. So desperate had the fighting been that the Russians lost almost all the men and all the horses of their two batteries; the guns had to be served by infantry and removed by Cossacks.

In the fights of the 7th, 8th, and 9th the Russians were the aggressors and the Turks the defenders, but the latter could not be dislodged in spite of the bull-dog like bravery and the (now) numerical superiority of the enemy.[18]

A number of minor actions were fought in this district during January and February 1854 (at Gol-

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entzé, Motzetzei, Risipiti, Chiupercheni, and other places), all of which were more or less successful for the Turkish arms; nevertheless the Russian belt of investment approached and pressed hard upon Calafat. The Turks had to abandon the outlying positions and concentrate their strength. Soon (middle of February) the place was surrounded by a semicircle of entrenched Russian bivouacs, concentric with that of its fortifications.

In this campaign the Turks showed once again their inability to utilise victories. The battles of Oltenitza and Chetaté might as well have been defeats for all the difference it would have made in the progress of the war.

Omar Pasha, by virtue of his office as commander-in-chief, found it impossible to devote himself to the details of the defence of the now practically invested Calafat (or, rather, semi-invested, for the communication with Widdin remained open), and he ceded the conduct of the operations to his bosom friend Ahmed Pasha, continuing to reside, however, for the greater part of the winter in Widdin, which he considered, erroneously, to be the objective of the enemy's movements in the Principalities.

All through the winter and the spring the senseless struggle for Calafat dragged its weary length. The stubborn Turks yielded not an inch of ground,

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and both sides suffered severely from cold, exposure, privations, and disease. Ahmed, although at that time probably the most highly-educated officer of the Ottoman army, was not so resolute in his sallies and sorties as the rabble wished; ugly and persistent, though quite unfounded, whispers of corruption made themselves heard. Omar, responding to popular clamour, replaced him by the less educated but more dashing Halim Pasha, Ahmed retaining, however, the command of the artillery and the engineering operations. This compromise worked well. Instigated by the constant pressure emanating from the vain, ambitious, and energetic Omar, whose European reputation was at stake, and who knew his person to be the focus of the eyes of the newspaper-reading world, driven also by the lash of an acclaiming and presumptuous populace, the two leaders, in command of brave and spirited troops, harassed the enemy to such an extent by frequent petty sallies — although after Chetaté only one action worthy of the name was fought, outside Calafat on the 19th April—that the Russians had sacrificed over 20,000 men (nearly half of their number, for Anrep had received reinforcements during the winter), by death or disablement from shot or disease, before they finally (in May 1854) gave up all attempts to capture Calafat. But the Turks, too, had lost severely; their defence cost

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them, from first to last, 12,000 men, a third of their strength.

The Englishman, Morris, was badly wounded in the action of the 19th April, and was brought to Widdin, where he died a few weeks later. The well-to-do Turk with whom he had lodged caused him to be buried in one of the *intra muros* cemeteries, which were in 1877 in desuetude and sad decay, and have since been demolished. The grave was shown to me; it exhibited a crude stone slab, erected—so I was told—after the war at the cost of Sami Pasha, a sworn Anglophile. Its badly executed and much obliterated inscription (reproducing the orthographical peculiarities) ran thus :—

SAM MORRIS
KAPITAIN OF ARTILRIE
30 YEAR OLD
FELL IN BATAILLE
AT
KALAFATU
AVRIL MDCCCLIV

Then followed the dead man's local name (Moussa Bey) and the Mohammedan date in Arabic characters. On the other side was an extraordinary Turkish sentence, the application of which to the deceased was quite obscure to me :—

سودي اما گلدي اولم

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(sevdi amma gheldi ölüm, *i.e.* he loved, but death came).[19] Who was this man that died in a foreign land fighting for an alien race, and what tragedy is so imperfectly indicated by the curt and enigmatical testimony of that forgotten grave?

The gun-spiked hills on their own shore, all cleverly utilised; the well-fortified islands; the threatening ordnance of Widdin; the conviction —constantly *ad oculos et aures* demonstrated—that the harder nut to crack awaited them on the other side of the river, induced the Russians to abstain from a general assault on the Calafat position. And if such a one had been undertaken and had succeeded—*cui bono?* The ease to swing a pound weight does not presuppose the ability of lifting a hundredweight. It would have required a stronger force, and a better, than that which Generals Anrep and Fischbach commanded, to carry Widdin.

If the reader will reflect upon the locale of this struggle—the defenders but a bridge-length removed from their base, which was in uninterrupted communication with the interior of the Empire, the assailants operating hundreds of miles away from their stores in an ill-cultivated, sparsely-populated, alien country —he will perceive the uselessness of this "siege," will understand its failure, and grasp the difficulties the beleaguerers had to contend against. As a matter of fact Calafat could never have been

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besieged — in the proper sense of the word — as long as Widdin stood unconquered.

For the Turks the episode was highly creditable, and Omar Pasha became one of the most popular men of the day, in the Orient as well as in the Occident. But a great deal of bombast and arrant nonsense was written anent both man and event —for and against—in the contemporary press, as also by later chroniclers; and to the historian it is extremely puzzling to find the truth that lies midway.[20] I have endeavoured to hold the balance of contradictory records, and have soberly stated events as the result of my researches, my discrimination applied thereto, and information locally collected, have painted them to me. The fact that most popular histories of the Crimean War start only with the participation of England and France, and completely ignore, or, at the best, skip over, Turkey's preliminary and very creditable share, has induced me to narrate the struggle for Calafat with more minuteness and circumstance than its inherent importance and its influence upon the war at large—which was *nil*—warrant.

In May General Anrep withdrew his forces from the neighbourhood of Calafat, and retreated on Bukarest, leaving Fischbach and his division in observation at Crayova. On the 15th June the bulk of Omar Pasha's Widdin army

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commenced its eastern march to help to defend Silistria against its besiegers.

Ismael Pasha was left in Widdin and Calafat, having 6000 men (half of them irregulars) to hold the towns against a renewal of the enemy's attacks. But none was undertaken, and in this quarter operations were at an end. Soon afterwards the Russians evacuated the Principalities, retreating before the Austrian occupation. Calafat received a small Austrian garrison, which was not withdrawn until after the peace (1856). Many legions of white-coated warriors passed through the Virgin Fortress during 1854, but none stayed there.

Of the events in the Balkan Peninsula — the unsuccessful siege of Silistria (12th May to 26th June 1854) and its gallant defence by a handful of Turks led by two British youngsters, than which there is no siege more disastrous to the offenders, and more honourable for the defenders, recorded in history, and the battle of Giurgevo (7th July 1854), in which again "British boys" distinguished themselves, and the name of which was in 1877 a word of glory and hope among the Ottoman soldiery—the limited scope of this work forbids me to speak in detail. Read for yourselves Kinglake's splendid account, and commit to memory the names of the twain of Silistria and the "seven boys of Giurgevo." After these events had duly played the rôle assigned

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to them in the book of fate, and the invader had been hurled back across the great river, the scene changed to the peninsula which has given its name to the war, and henceforth the Turks performed a subordinate part, while the ordnance of England and France thundered the *Leitmotif* in the trenches of Sebastopol.

A plain and obvious lesson is conveyed by the struggle for Calafat. A double position like that of Widdin and its *vis-à-vis*, that is, two bridge-connected towns on the two banks of a great river, one facing the enemy, the other in communication with the heart of the country, is impregnable. Granted, of course, that the conditions which obtained in our case in point are fulfilled, namely, that the towns are efficiently armed, manned, fortified, equipped, supplied, and commanded. There are several such positions on the Continent. I choose at random Cologne–Deutz, Strassburg–Kehl, Hamburg–Harburg—but no British analogy suggests itself to me. This momentous lesson the Turkish leaders and wirepullers had forgotten, or ignored, in 1877, to the disaster of the Empire, with one honourable and brilliant exception, outvoted in council by a stupid and corrupt majority. Of this more in its proper place.

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CHAPTER VIII

APOTHEOSIS

Being a summary of the later doings, the death, and the character of the Renegade of Widdin.

"I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks."
SHAKESPEARE.

THE tumultuous closing career of the great renegade, with its accompanying thunder of cannon, deserves a cursory examination.

Already towards the end of April 1854 Omar Pasha had gone to Shumla, to hold a consultation with the French and English commanders, and Widdin knew him no more. By clever concentration of troops he effected the raising of the siege of Silistria, and by allowing the Russians unchallenged possession of the fever-haunted Dobrudcha swamps he inflicted upon them losses more severe than pitched battles would have had in their train, without the cost of a single life to his own army. When the Russians retreated he followed them to Bukarest.

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The theatre of war was shifted to the Crimea, and Omar commanded the Turkish troops (first only a division, increased subsequently to a corps of 30,000 men) which accompanied the allied armies. He led his forces to victory in the battle of Eupatoria (21st March 1855[21]), and assisted in the siege of Sebastopol. When this town had fallen (8th September 1855) he repaired to Batum in Asia, and commanded the corps sent for the relief of beleaguered Kars, but was not in time, through which fact he incurred, momentarily, the imperial displeasure. That fortress succumbed to the Russians (27th November 1855), who, their military honour being now vindicated, were ready to listen to pacific proposals and lay aside their battered arms. The Treaty of Paris (30th March 1856) put an end to the useless war. But it terminated not the military career of the Renegade of Widdin, who was destined to employ his courage, prowess, and cruelty in the interests of the half-moon for eleven years longer, chiefly in the congenial task of quelling the rebellions of his former co-religionists.

Appointed Governor of Bagdad in 1857 he was deposed two years later, owing to high-handed excesses of his authority. He was in disgrace and semi-exile in Kutahia, Asia Minor, until in 1861 the new Sultan, Abdul Aziz, called him to Constan-

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tinople and entrusted him with the command of the army about to operate in rebellious Herzegovina. Once more Omar was in his element. In 1862 and 1863 he fought successfully both the insurgents of that province and their allies, the Montenegrins. From 1864 to 1867 he was military governor, first in Monastir, then in Shumla. In 1867 he was appointed commander of the army campaigning in Crete to repress the rebellion, in which task he failed—for the first time in his career—despite the inexorable rigour with which he treated the Christians and the cruel punishment he meted out to his prisoners. In the winter of that year he was recalled to Constantinople, retired—by compulsion—from the army, and received as a reward of thirty years of sometimes brilliant, mostly satisfactory, and always arduous services the honorary rank of Serdar Ekrem (commander-in-chief). Excepting a brief and not successful spell as Seraskier (1868) he spent the remainder of his days in repose, having amassed wealth and landed possessions, gained European fame, and obtained every distinction that a grateful sovereign could bestow. He died in Stamboul in 1871, at the age of sixty-five.

It is a fatal consummation that every great general Turkey has owned has stained his soldierly fame with actions—often outside his proper sphere—which in countries of a better-ordered common-

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wealth would render his claim on reputation and gratitude preposterous, his continuance in the nation's service an anomaly. Abdul Kerim by corruption, Mehemed Ali by culpable hesitancy, Suleiman by intrigues, Osman by compromising devices in the always questionable game of politics, Omar by cruelty—they have, each and all, gravely tainted a fair name. Omar—besides personal bravery, contempt of death, and courting of danger, qualities which are implied in the word "soldier," and which he possessed in a rare degree—was distinguished, firstly, as a far-seeing and prudent strategian—*vide* his dispositions which, between the Sultan's declaration of war (23rd October 1853) and the consummation of the English-French-Turkish alliance (28th March 1854), prevented a Russian invasion of Turkey; secondly, by a powerful personal influence over his subordinates, of which proposition the defence of Calafat is the best support; and, thirdly, by luck, which plays a more important rôle in warfare than many may suppose. Was not the Great Frederick the most implicit believer in martial luck? "Geh' Er—Er ist ein schlechter General—Er hat kein Glück!" (Be off!—you are a bad general: you have no luck!) is a remark which he is said to have addressed to more than one of his subordinates. Omar was essentially a lucky man. In fourteen campaigns he failed only

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twice: in not raising the siege of Kars in 1855, and in not subduing the Cretan rebels in 1867.

Much as Omar was celebrated by his contemporaries, after the event the critics were wise and belittled him. "If the Russians had only been led properly; if they had only mustered in sufficient force; if this, that, or the other supposition had become verified, Omar would not have been able to hold Calafat for a day, or to prevent the enemy's troops from swamping the whole of the Empire." But what an "if"! In the greater domain of war as well as within the narrower precincts of battle, victory is to him who makes the fewest mistakes. Omar erred less often than his adversaries, and therefore he won, personally at Oltenitza, Chetaté, Calafat, and Eupatoria, indirectly at Silistria and Giurgevo. He beat his enemy, and can fairly claim to live in history as a successful general, all the "ifs" and "buts" of all the sedentary strategians and stay-at-home wiseacres in the world despite. As an organiser Omar was hardly above the dead Ottoman level of half-asleep mediocrity, and as an administrator he was a failure.

Personally the Renegade of Widdin was not an amiable or even estimable man, being unscrupulous, brutal, and ruthless to a degree, fond of inflicting pain, innocent of even the faintest vestige of love, pity, or humanity. Next to cruelty, greed was his

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ruling passion. He was also hypocritical, licentious, and not free from the old Ottoman taint—sowing corruption. Many traits in his sordid character, many deeds of his heavy hand, many events in his stormy career, are best forgotten.

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CHAPTER IX

THE LAY OF THE BELL

Being an account of pacific events within Widdin during, and shortly after, the Crimean War, including the episode of the Christian bell.

1853 to 1860.

"And as the clang dies out, that, riding
Far on the breezes, loudly boomed,
So may she teach, nought is abiding,
All things of earth to death are doomed."

SCHILLER (Sir THEODORE MARTIN).

ALL the suppositions on which the Czar Nicholas I. had based his conviction of success in the great war which he had originated in 1853, by the ruthless invasion of his neighbour's dominion, had been falsified by events. He had reckoned upon Prussia and Austria as allies. The former remained passive; the latter sided with the enemy, by her occupation of the Danube Principalities. He had counted on Sardinia's neutrality, and she joined his foes. He had anticipated France to be unable to wield, and England to be unwilling to draw, the sword. Both empires had unsheathed, and had struck hard. He

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had considered Turkey as feeble, diseased, comatose, ready to be shattered into splinters on the first contact. The names of Oltenitza, Chetaté, Calafat, Silistria, and Giurgevo, had knocked it into his thick head that Turkey was able and powerful, prepared for all emergencies, in fullest possession of the strongest vitality, and could strike blows, unskilled perhaps, but fast and furious, and strike home too. He had meant to invade, and was invaded; he had intended to operate on his adversary's domain, and encountered hostile armies operating on his own shores. And, lastly, he had counted upon a general rising of the rayahs throughout his enemy's dominions, whereas not a hand was raised among the "oppressed" to help him. Of bitter disappointment and impotent rage the grim old autocrat had died (2nd March 1855), bequeathing a legacy of blood and ruin to his peaceful and enlightened son.

Not a single Christian in Turkey sided with the pretended liberator. A miserable paid Servian agitator, by name Cheko, tried to form a band of Bulgarian volunteers, and failed dismally. There was no uniformity in the Ottoman Empire, and the condition of the masses—whether Mussulmans or rayahs, Jews or Gentiles—was dependent upon the ability or the incapacity, the honesty or the corruption, the tolerance or the bigotry, the leniency or the cruelty, upon the bent of mind and trend of

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thoughts, even upon the momentary whims, of governors of vilayets, pashaliks, and sanjaks, of kaim-makams of towns and kadis of villages. In many places, undoubtedly, fear of bloody retribution, and the recollection of merciless suppression of former outbursts, disunity and apathy also, and the sturdy attitude of the Moslem population, prevented the Christian community from availing itself of the absence of the troops. Again, most rayah rebellions emanated from without, and exterior influences and inspiration were absent in those years —with the solitary and inglorious exception mentioned above—for Servia, Wallachia, Montenegro, and Greece were busy with their own affairs. And lastly, sooth to say, the Bulgarians were not nearly so much oppressed and violently dissatisfied as Russia, to gain her private ends, was wont to make-believe. In Widdin—and to the confines of the pashalik must we limit our investigations—the Christians were, not only in neutral inaction, but actively opposed to Muscovite interference, for the simple reason that they were content to remain under Turkish *régime*. That such was the case I have on the authority of many citizens and contemporaries, of all denominations; and the causes of this consummation I shall try to establish to a doubting reader's entire satisfaction.

An accumulation of many facts and circumstances

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peculiar to Widdin, each perhaps insignificant in itself, but of powerful aggregate, had produced the exceptional sentiment of the populace, which—it must be remembered—consisted to the amount of over 50 per cent of Bulgarians, of nearly 70 per cent of Christians generally. Firstly, by its situation it was the town of the Empire which lay nearest to Christian supremacy and Western civilisation, and the easiest attainable, both by road and by river. From time immemorial it had been a harbour and a sanctuary to Austrian political refugees. It was often visited by rich globe-trotters. It sheltered within its strong walls numerous aliens—Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, and the valiant Poles referred to in a previous chapter. Its Moslem populace was thus imbued with many Western notions of tolerance, humanity, and justice, and was generally more advanced than that of any other large town of the Empire. Secondly, Widdin had a strong and wealthy Jewish community, amounting to nearly ten per cent of the population, and the influence of the Israelites went all in favour of tolerance and of loyal adherence to the lawful masters; in fact, the Jews of Turkey, whether Spanioles or Franks, were, and are to-day, good and at times even enthusiastic patriots. Thirdly, Widdin was prosperous, and the number of malcontents within its walls was small; thus there was

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little desire for a change. Fourthly, the citizens of all denominations had a great deal of local and urban pride. This was brought home to me forcibly and repeatedly in 1877, and then the feeling was, if anything, less intense, on account of the insurrection of the preceding years, than it had been in 1853, after decades of internal peace; for the town, the impregnable, the oft defended, the bravely held, the bulwark of every nation that had owned it, the crowning ambition of every rival who had coveted it, was one which a citizen, of whatever creed or race, might well love, the traditions of which he might justly cherish.

I have not mentioned the general causes which obtained throughout the Empire,—such as the spread of education and culture, the progress in commerce and industry, the improvement in the class of men that ruled provinces and districts—among which I must number foremost the fact that the janissaries, the real oppressors of the Christians, were, since 1826, dead or in exile.

How strong the feeling of loyalty had at times been among the rayahs is clearly illustrated by the attitude of the Servians during the Austro-Turkish War of 1737 to 1739. Austria, a pretended liberator, had obtained possession of Servia by the Treaty of Passarovitz in 1718, and had swamped the country with her troops, who approached Widdin

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within a few hours' march. But the alien conducted himself so much worse than Turkey had ever done that the Servian Christians actually rose against the new masters (1738), and with them the whole of the pashalik of Widdin was in arms. It is a matter of history that the Austrians were dispossessed and the Turks reinstalled in Servia with the help of the rayahs. Janissary cruelty, pasha greed, and rotten officialdom alienated the feelings of the latter; but for these Servia would have become one of the most loyal provinces of the Empire—all the conditions of which consummation were existent in 1739—and would probably be such at the present day.

One coincidence contributed largely to the trend of popular sentiment in Widdin: the succession of pashas since Pasvan Oglu, all of whom had, unknowingly sometimes, but none the less effectually, added their quota to the amelioration of the rayahs' position. Pasvan Oglu, by his semi-independence and the knowledge that his power lay in the unity of the motley crowd of his subjects; Molla, the wise, the mild, the benevolent, whose sympathies were openly with the Christians; Hussein, in his stern desire to do justice to each and all; and lastly Sami, the hater of militarism, the admirer of British tolerance and beneficial rule, the imitator of French culture and Paris refinement;—they had

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brought about, one being a complement to the other, the consummation that the Christians of Widdin were happier, more contented, more prosperous, and more powerful as a body than any other rayah community of the Empire.

True, some semi-barbarous limitations still weighed upon them, for example, Sami's silly building interdict; but a single act of bigotry or stupidity could not counterbalance the steady, though possibly quite unintended progress which had worked out its own salvation for half a century past.

What had the rayahs to complain of? They were allowed undisputed possession of their properties and their businesses; they were exempt from military service, and that was a decided advantage, whilst the capitation tax was trifling; they had the internal administration of their communities and a share in municipal affairs; they were no more heavily taxed than their Moslem fellow-citizens; they had no voice in the government of the country, it is true, but neither had the Mohammedans, for Turkey was, and is an absolute monarchy; they had their schools and their churches; they could cram the heads of their little ones with any and as much wisdom as they chose; they could pray from morning till night without a single Moslem caring the proverbial straw; they had their popes,[22] and

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could listen to their irresponsible spouting whenever they felt so inclined; they could use their own language to the utmost capacity of throats or lungs; the pasha was ever ready to receive their petitions and to listen to their prayers; and in any serious difficulty the all-powerful Austrian Consul (previous to the war also the Russian) was prepared, on good cause being shown, to lend them active aid and moral support. The only tangible difference in the treatment of Christians and Moslems lay in the fact that the former were forbidden to carry or possess arms.

No Moslem ever objects to a Christian church or chapel. On the contrary, in the towns they rather like them, as being ornaments to street architecture. No Moslem ever lifts a finger or utters a word to prevent a rayah from worshipping whenever, how often, at what prodigious length, and in what preposterous wise he pleases. Does he not adore the same Allah, and are not Moussa (Moses) and Saint Issa (Jesus) prophets in Islam's tenets? But what he does regard with intense dislike, and tries to prevent by all means at his command, is the tolling of a bell. In this he stands not alone, for many millions of good Christians in England and elsewhere honestly consider the peal a nuisance and an abomination, which, without an atom of religion is its blatant clamour, is conducive only to testy

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temper and wicked words. Now in Widdin, in 1856, to commemorate the peace, the Bulgarian community had bought a modest little bell, and had suspended it in a specially erected wooden structure attached to their best church. To celebrate both the peace and the Sultan's concession to the Christians of his domain, that henceforth they were to be regarded as equivalent in every respect to his Moslem subjects, the bell was tolled lustily a whole day long, to the gratuitous enjoyment of a gaping rabble and the intense annoyance of the Mussulmans. And when at sunset the muezzins called all good believers to prayers the bell's clamour overpowered their voices and mocked their sonorous Arabic phrases. For 458 years no Christian peal had dared open its brazen mouth in Widdin, and after that interval the bell spake not for more than one day; for in the night the Moslems stole the clapper, and thrust it, with many curses, into the deepest well. The pasha, appealed to next day by the indignant Bulgars, decided that they could have their bell, and as many more as fancy dictated or money permitted them to purchase; but, since the tolling was a vexation, a sacrilege, and a disturbance of the public peace, no bell should be rung within the walls of his city. And thus it remained. For fifteen years the bell hung tongueless, a sad spectacle of dumb and decaying grandeur, a hollow

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carcase without visible or audible inside, feeding on its own rust and mourning in pathetic silence. To such an ignominious extent it fell from its high estate—literally as well as figuratively—that the dirty gutter-boys used it as a target for their missiles, rejoicing with an exceeding joy when a well-thrust stone produced a mock clang like a spasmodic growl wafted from across the grave, from the speechless, the soulless, the bowelless. And, to crown all this shame and infamy, there was among the projectiles hurled by the irreverent human muck-worms a dead cat, which, embracing the top-hook with its lifeless claws, stuck there, rotted, and became a skeleton. At last, in 1871, the obliging Austrian Consul, Ritter von Schultz, moved the lenient and enlightened Pasha Aziz to quash the hateful interdict. A new clapper was bought, and once more the streets of the Virgin Fortress re-sounded with a joyous peal.

The lay of the bell constitutes the only serious difficulty that occurred to the Moslems and the rayahs of Widdin during the interregnum of peace, just two decades long, between the Treaty of Paris and the outbreak of the Bulgarian revolution.

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CHAPTER X

THE PRISONER OF WIDDIN

Being an introduction to a strange personality endowed with many lives.

"It might be months, or years, or days,
I kept no count—I took no note."

BYRON.

As Diarbekr and Kutahia in Asia have been, for nearly five centuries, the Siberia to obstinate or dangerous statesmen and generals of European Turkey, so has Widdin in Europe ever been the place of exile to all kinds of revolutionary spirits of Asiatic Turkey. Of the many who have wasted a useless repentance among the Danube swamps I shall but mention the Druse chiefs,[28] the instigators of the awful massacre of Christians in Damascus in 1861, who—after having first been sent to Belgrad, where they were, like wild beasts, exhibited for money in iron cages—were banished to Widdin, to rot in the atmosphere of the river marshes, to Asiatics particularly obnoxious and disastrous.

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Otherwise they were left very much alone, had their own lodgings, worked at various trades, earned good money, and even held public offices. They died off quickly, however, and I met in 1877 the last survivor, a man who went by the name of Iskender (Alexander), worked for a Tsintsar silversmith, and had been a servant to one of the chiefs, whose exile he had shared voluntarily. By reason of the similarity of the names and the identity of their destinies he was often mistaken, by foreign visitors, for the man who is the hero of the merry little tale I shall have to unfold presently. He never undeceived his interviewers, and was quite proud to pose as Iskendjer, the banished Kurd chief. The natives of Widdin, of course, knew perfectly well who was who, and laughed heartily at the credulity of the rich Austrians and Englishmen who occasionally passed through the town. Many a piastre the wily Druse —not a bad fellow either, peaceable, industrious, and well behaved—has pocketed by means of his glib tongue and a grandiloquent yarn.[24] He, having been an eye-witness, told me an extraordinary story about the Damascus massacre, which is too long for reproduction, and if reproduced would probably not be believed. A Roumanian shell sent him to his account in January 1878, and with him died the last of the Druse prisoners of Damascus notoriety.

But by far the most remarkable of all those

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who have spent a compulsory leisure within the walls of the Virgin Fortress is Iskendjer, the Bey (Prince) of Aslom, erstwhile one of the most dangerous and bloodthirsty of Kurd chiefs. I have already stated, when dealing with the transformation of Michael Lattas, that he was subdued and captured by Omar Pasha in 1846. He had been guilty of so many aggressions on territory inhabited by Armenians, and of so many cruelties towards them, that England and France prevailed upon the Sultan to banish him and keep him a close prisoner for the rest of his life. That he took part in the fighting at Chetaté, in January 1854, has already been said. He was actually allowed to dwell in the pasha's serai, had the command of money (whence derived I have not been able to ascertain), and was President of the Supreme Criminal Court of the pashalik. Ponder over that anomaly, dear reader: he, the "convict," presided over the Criminal Court!

This amiable gentleman, a slim, well-built fellow with handsome features, aped European manners, and towards 1860 he had become a dandy of the most foppish kind, wearing Bond Street made clothes and sporting an eye-glass. He had taken kindly to soap, washing himself very nearly every day, and when walking the streets paraded kid gloves, cigar, cane, and pug-dog with ribbon, bow,

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and bell. And actually this "prisoner," whom the good folk of England and France supposed to be languishing, in expiation of his countless atrocities, in the most loathsome dungeon beneath the castle-moat, who lodged, fared, and dressed better than 99 per cent of his fellow-creatures, constantly petitioned the Sultan for "better treatment"! Truly, strange things are possible in the Ottoman Empire! The strangest, gentle reader, is still to come. He was pointed out to me in 1877, but (a very big "but" indeed!) I was told, in strict confidence, by a consulate kavass (policeman), that the original Iskendjer had died, long since, of too much secret brandy in his constitution, that—in order to enable the authorities to draw the money set aside by Government for his keep, and to appropriate certain highly mysterious revenues connected with this erstwhile notorious person—some pasha's favourite had literally stepped into the dead man's shoes. This individual—a renegade Syrian Christian—had accidentally killed himself whilst in a state of rum, and the person I saw was the third bearer of that historic name, which, having once been a word of execration in Europe, was kept alive, whilst the lawful owner had long ago gone to the happy hunting-ground where bears and Christians and other big game are plentiful. I doubt not but that Iskendjer, if the town had

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remained Turkish in 1878, would be living at the present day, in which case the Prisoner of Widdin would have reached the good old age of ninety.

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CHAPTER XI

PACIFIC

Being an account of the doings at Widdin—principally domestic and municipal—during the interregnum of peace ending in 1875.

"To entertain these fair well-spoken days."
SHAKESPEARE.

SAMI's successor in the pashalik (1860) was Suleiman, a long-headed, far-seeing man, who quashed the former's Building Act and added two Christian members to the Municipal Council. Up to then there had been one Bulgar and ten Turks; now there were three and ten, and presently (about 1871) the rayahs were conceded a total of five members. Ten Moslems (4000), five Christians (8000), and one Jew (1000) was the constitution of the Municipal Council in 1877, the figures in parentheses denoting, approximately, the number of residents.

In 1862 Widdin's Moslem population was increased by nearly 500 souls, the expatriated of Belgrad, where the Mohammedan quarter was to

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be demolished. Between 1856 and 1864 the district received some 3000 Circassian settlers. Well the villages could have spared such an untamed, vermin-stricken addition. Happily very few of this gentry dwelt in town.

Historical events of the last importance were consummated just over the borders, on both sides, during this period; but Widdin was not disturbed by them. For, sooth to say, and to break with all the lying traditions which have ever played the Muscovite game so well, Widdin, whether Christian, Jewish, or Mohammedan, was happy and prosperous, and could afford to look upon the squabbles of malcontents outside its own walls with supreme indifference.

In 1862 Belgrad was the scene of a bloody encounter between Turks and Servians, the result of which was the emigration of the whole Moslem population of the capital. Four years later the Porte was induced, by outside pressure, to withdraw her troops altogether from the country. Moldavia and Wallachia had united in 1859 and elected the Colonel Alexander Cusa as Prince of Roumania. He reigned, badly and stormily, for seven years, with various tumultuous interruptions, and was deposed in 1866. His successor was Prince Karl of Hohenzollern, the present king.

Both Servia and Roumania, although paying

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tribute to the Porte, were autonomous and practically independent. In either case the process, connected with a great deal of excitement, commotion, intrigues, and with some bloodshed, had been accomplished within a few miles west and east of Widdin, without disturbing the tranquillity of the district or the equanimity of the citizens.

In 1870 Suleiman, Pasha of Widdin, died, and the rayahs had the good fortune to have as his successor Aziz, who, although a Moslem, was of Bulgarian descent [25] and was the wisest, most benevolent, and most enlightened ruler that ever inhabited a Turkish serai. Under his *régime* many Christians were entrusted with important public offices, both honorary and paid; it was he who allowed them to toll their bell, and who increased their votes in the Municipal Council to five. The rayahs of Widdin christened him "Mother of the Bulgars," and worshipped him; the Turks nicknamed him Giaour Pasha, and despised him.

Aziz was a great sportsman, and the downs of Widdin provided him with excellent hunting-ground. In his passion for the chase—for to that it amounted—he broke with the traditions of centuries, since Turkish officialdom has ever been decried as fat, lazy, and voracious.

At that time the enlightened Midhat Pasha, one

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of the ablest and most honest men Turkey has ever had in her service, was Governor of the Tuna vilayet, and the two worked well together. Had the Moslems of Widdin only left Aziz alone, and had Stamboul not intrigued against Midhat, Widdin would have been connected by rail with Sofia in the south and Plevna in the east, before the war of 1877 broke out, and possibly these important helps to strategical movement might have saved the country. The Oriental is very short-sighted![26]

During the reign of Aziz the Good the following roads were built: Widdin–Artzar, Artzar–Biélograd-chik, Widdin – Adlié, and the great highroad Widdin–Belgrad was at last completed. The town was placed in telegraphic communication with Sofia, Rustchuk, and Belgrad. The river steam-traffic was regulated and greatly extended by an equitable arrangement made with the Austrian company, and a secondary line of small steamers, flying the Turkish flag, plied between Widdin and Nikopoli. All these works were due to the energy and the foresight of Midhat, and to the zealous co-operation of Aziz. The two civil hospitals of Widdin are also a creation of those pashas. In 1875 Midhat commenced the first railway in that quarter—that between Plevna and Port Sultanié, but his recall to Stamboul put an end to the operations, much to the disaster of the Empire. The railway is unbuilt at

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the present day; Port Sultanié is in ruins, and Widdin, too, is still innocent of the iron horse.

How good trade was in Widdin is proved by the fact that in 1877 no filigree craftsman or saddler had, for fifteen years, made an ornament or a harness without having previously received a commission from a native, or an indent from abroad. In neither branch was stock kept. And it must be remembered that these two industries—taken as one whole—were not a part revenue or a side issue, but were *the* commonwealth of the town—were that which lace-making is to Nottingham or cotton-printing to Manchester. Can England the mighty, the boastful, who is not capable even of finding bread for her children, show anything faintly approaching that feat of despised Turkey?

In the various petty rayah rebellions during the years 1860 to 1870 Widdin had no share. They were, each and all, instigated from without (that is, by the secret Servo-Russian Committee, which had its principal seat in Bukarest), and left the bulk of the Bulgarians quite cool. Useless, untimely, ill-advised, and ill-managed as they were, they exhibited a great deal of wasted heroism. I wish I had the time and the space to relate to you (for the story has never been told before), how a hundred young Bulgars, all belonging to the best families, landed at night with boats in Sistova, having been

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equipped in Roumania, and fought their way to the Balkans, where, in a ferocious struggle with overwhelming odds—a whole brigade of Zaptiés—every one of them was killed. It was a bit of modernised Thermopylæ, but so foolish! Can a hundred young men liberate a province of two million inert inhabitants from the supremacy of an Empire that can place a million armed men in the field?

That the rayahs of Widdin availed themselves of the right of petition to the pasha on every possible or impossible occasion will be apparent to the reader from the following incident, which occurred during the reign of Aziz, and which a dragoman of the Austrian Consul related to me in 1877 as an example of Bulgar ignorance. The reader will please to bear in mind that I am not reciting fiction, but am recording a dry fact; that I am not speaking of barbarous times and a savage country, but of the year of grace 1873, and of semi-Christian Europe.

The six-year-old son of a poor rayah, toddling about in the gutter, lost his way in the crooked streets, and was taken in late at night, out of charity, by a wealthy Moslem, who happened to have in his house, as a guest, a Mohammedan divine of some renown and learning hailing from Stamboul. This man, who spoke Bulgarian, sat the child on his knee, played with him, and told him a fairy tale. Next

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day the youngster was claimed, and the ungrateful father, believing that a spell had been worked, and that none but the doer could undo it, actually petitioned the ever-patient pasha to the effect that the priest might be compelled to lift the curse. Naturally enough Aziz, a good Moslem, although of Bulgarian descent, refused, contemptuously and angrily, telling the graceless "dog" to go to djehennem. Whereupon the frightened and furious parent went straight to the Austrian Consul, hoping to induce him to support his case. The Consul not only declined, but gave him a sound talking. The dragoman stated his firm belief that the father would have killed the child, as being contaminated, had it not been for fear of the law. In any case a preposterous ceremony was gone through, in which a pope did mighty things with images and holy water, and said prayers of fearful length and efficacy. What do you think of that for a Christian divine of the nineteenth century?

It was not to be expected that Aziz, a thorn in the eye to the orthodox Moslems, would remain long in power. In 1874 he was removed, and why? because, forsooth, the Mohammedans had warned the Sultan that he, the loyal, the peace-loving, the mild, the humane, was about to restore in the pashalik Pasvan Oglu's "barbarous" and "treasonable" semi-independence! A good thing

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for the country it would have been had he done so! For a few months Aziz was in disgrace, but already in 1875 he was appointed Governor of Philippopolis, much to the advantage of that populous and important city. I am told (though this is but hearsay) that in January 1878, when the troops had retreated and abandoned the rabble to its evil passions, he was cruelly slain by the "Christians" of the town, for whom, and for which, he had done so much, even at the risk of exciting displeasure in high places.

Aziz's successor in Widdin bore, strangely, the same name, and was, for distinction's sake and on account of his orthodox propensities, called Haji Aziz.[27] He was a Turkish official of the good old sort, bent only upon two things: filling his belly and filling his purse, without the vestige of fairness, equity, justice, or tolerance in his constitution, lazy, corrupt, licentious, dishonest, avaricious, bigoted, and altogether contemptible. Widdin had, luckily, not had such an infamous master within the present century. It will never be known how much he contributed, indirectly, to the rebellion of 1875 and to its sequence, the loss of Bulgaria to the Ottoman Empire. Happily he could not undo very much of the good his predecessors had done, although he tried his best, for ideas of enlightenment and tolerance, habits of extra-racial

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and unsectarian neighbourly love and mutual support, a certain sense of the commonweal,—quite exceptional in Turkey,—and a strong urban patriotism (if such a paradox be allowed), had taken root too deeply in Widdin after a rule of six governors, each excellent in his way; and at length he encountered, in many of his decrees and most of his desires, the opposition of the very people who had helped him to his office—the Moslems of the town. He was the last Pasha of Widdin, and certainly the worst in a span of 480 years. Verily, an inglorious end to the Ottoman reign!

I have said nothing of the quarrel which exercised the rayah mind during the fifties and sixties, and was conducted by both sides with the utmost vigour and acerbity: that between the Bulgarian people and the Greek Church which had been forced upon them by Constantinople. It would lead too far to inquire into its origin and causes; moreover, it is no different from the many unsavoury dissensions in all countries where Church and people have been at loggerheads; in fact, it resembles the dispute between the Welsh people and the Established Church at the present day. Suffice it to say that in 1859 the Bulgars played their trump-card by threatening to go over in a body to Rome,—which had been conducting a strenuous propaganda,—whereupon the Sultan and

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the Patriarch promptly made important concessions, which, however, did not lead until thirteen years afterwards (1872) to the establishment of an autonomous Bulgarian Church. There was much rejoicing in Widdin, and the bell with the new clapper boomed lustily all day long, much to the bewilderment of the Mohammedans, who could not make out what all this fuss was about; for to the Moslem mind, accustomed to a faith undivided by dogma and unaffected by party strife, Greek Church, Bulgarian Church, Roman Church, meant all one and the same thing. So far as the quality of the divines was concerned, it would have been better if the Bulgars had remained faithful to the Greek allegiance, better still if they had embraced Romanism; but the event had one practical result: somehow it gave a powerful incentive—not emanating from any Church or sect—to the desire for popular education, and in 1874 the pashalik of Widdin, the most advanced of the Empire in this respect, counted nearly a hundred Bulgarian schools, whereas in 1830 it had had none, in 1840 two, in 1850 ten, in 1860 thirty, and in 1870 eighty.

As late as the spring of 1875 Kanitz, the German traveller, an earnest friend of the rayahs and a strong Turcophobe, wrote: "To-day Bulgaria is in deepest peace." Little did he think that ere his words were in print events of the most terrible

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description would give them the lie direct. The reader had now better say good-bye to all that is pacific, for to the length of many chapters my narrative is tainted with blood and replete with horrors.

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CHAPTER XII

REVOLUTIONARY

Being a skeleton account of events in the Balkan Peninsula in 1875 and 1876.

> "I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;
> It weeps, it bleeds; and each new day a gash
> Is added to her wounds."
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

A READER not old enough to remember the world-stirring incidents of twenty years ago—and mainly to him this humble volume addresses itself—or not acquainted by book-learning with the trend of events in the Balkan Peninsula during the historic years 1875 and 1876, may wish to have a summary account—without which the detailed narrative of any one particular phase, like the present, is neither intelligible nor profitable—of those occurrences, which at the time roused Europe, more particularly England, to the highest pitch of excitement. It may not be amiss, therefore, to give an outline of that terrible episode in the ever-young Eastern

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question; and the resumption of our story will fill the gaps, as occasion requires, with local, personal, and other details, thus endowing at least a portion of the skeleton with nerves and sinews, and, I hope, with individual life. For I am at one with a recent contributor to the *Revue des deux Mondes*, who maintains that it is better by far to describe a single incident thoroughly, than a whole episode scurvily, and who, after having given a meagre sketch of the battle of Le Bourget, relates, not that sanguinary struggle in its entirety, but one small phase of it—the fight for a door—with wondrous power and vividness.[28]

If to the reader of mature years, or to him of vast research, I should appear guilty of telling an oft-told tale over again, I tender every due apology.

In July 1875 Herzegovina aroused the Ottoman Empire from its peaceful slumber by rebelling. In the following month Bosnia joined in the insurrection, which was purely local (that is, a rayah outburst, such as Turkey has had by the score), and constituted a purely local question until the interference of Servia and Montenegro—despite their official protestations of neutrality—rendered the matter one of European importance. There can be no doubt that the rebellion was secretly promoted by Russia,—in any case it had been instigated by

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professional agitators, and some one must pay the piper.

Owing to a natural desire to avoid European intervention Turkey's attempted subjugation of the rebels was lax. But when the latter had insolently rejected, in March 1876, repeated proposals of pacification, the Porte, having done her part toward a peaceful settlement, commenced energetic action, laying aside all endeavours to act with leniency, since they had proved so futile, and all pretence to deal out clemency. In May, Turkey was compelled to reckon also with Montenegro, where both ruler and populace were very bitter against her, and which declared war, whilst Servia continued to make useless protestations at Stamboul, and insincere attempts to act the rôle of mediator.

The growing dissatisfaction of Europe with the Sublime Porte received a fatal incentive on the 6th May 1876, when fanatics murdered the French and German Consuls at Saloniki. To atone for this deplorable incident Turkey hastened to comply with the stringent demands of the Powers, and numerous were the arrests, convictions, executions, and banishments.

To add to all these troubles internal disruption rent the very foundations of the Empire. On the 30th May 1876 the Sultan Abdul Aziz was dethroned, and on the 4th June he was assassinated.

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His weak-minded nephew and successor, Murad V., went mad over the many horrors perpetrated in the capital—among which was the murder of three Cabinet Ministers (15th June) in the house of another Minister—and was deposed on the 31st August. He is alive now, and is reported to be a hopeless lunatic. The successor was his brother, Abdul Hamid II., the present Sultan.

Meanwhile the insurrection of Bulgaria, planned and prepared by Russia, had broken out. Already during the summer and autumn of 1875 there had been risings in the province, which were easily suppressed by the troops. But in June 1876 the Porte had to face no longer a revolt, or even a series of revolts, but a revolution on a grand scale. It was the Christians' war of annihilation against the Mohammedan minority, and will for ever remain a blot on history, and a stain upon the name of the Muscovite and Servian instigators. No one in Turkey deceived himself as to the ultimate designs of the wirepullers in St. Petersburg: to weaken the military power of the Porte by continuous petty warfare, and thus prepare a way for the total extinction of the Ottoman reign in Europe by the Russian arms. Unmentionable horrors were committed in the name of the Saviour. Of these Europe took no notice.

The Moslem population of the Empire rose

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against the bloody aggression of the Christians. With the aid of troops they repaid them in their own coin, with incendiarism, outrages, wholesale slaughter, and countless summary executions. The country was in flames. Numerous villages were destroyed, entire districts depopulated; in the neighbourhood of Tatar Bazardjik alone fifty-four communities were exterminated; 12,000 men, women, and children were killed by the infuriated Mohammedans. Russia raised the cry of "Bulgarian atrocities," which found an answering echo throughout Europe. The last remaining vestige of international sympathy with Turkey became alienated, and outside England—and there only a section of the public—nobody seemed to remember that the rayahs were the aggressors, that they merely received back what they had dealt out to the Mussulmen.

By the end of June tranquillity had been restored at the cost of thousands of human lives and a whole country in ruins. On the 1st July, Servia, at Russia's secret mandate, and furnished with her money, crossed the frontier, ostensibly to pacify the neighbouring provinces, in reality to pave the way for the coming Muscovite invasion. With this date the Oriental question enters upon a new phase.

This is an outline of the causes and the course of the great Bulgarian revolution.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE GYPSY HANGMAN

Showing in how far the pashalik Widdin was affected by the insurrectionary events of 1875 and 1876.

"'Tis not so difficult to die."
BYRON.

THE causes which operated on the rayahs of Widdin in 1853, and which have been mentioned to the accompaniment of the one day's clang of the Christian bell, obtained also in 1875 and 1876. The Bulgarians of the town looked with stolid indifference upon the horrible outrages perpetrated by their co-religionists in other parts of the Empire, upon the still more horrible punishments dealt out to them by the incensed Moslem populace and the only too willing soldiery,—for inertness and apathy have ever been characteristics of the Turkish Bulgarian, until the fresh breath of national life which the Battenberger infused into the country roused him to vitality, and stirred him to deeds which set the world astare. Cowardice has also

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often been imputed to him, but that is a calumny. When all motions that sway the soul are asleep, courage is among them; but you cannot accuse the slumberer of its total absence, any more than you can arraign a sober man for drunkenness because he dreams that he is intoxicated.

A vile Servian agitator, whose real name has not transpired, but who called himself Shisman, to remind the Bulgarians of the proud Widdin dynasty of czars, tried his best to set the rayahs of the town aflame by incendiary speeches and a great liberality in the wine-shops. He had the command of money, a glib tongue, a ready wit, a superficial knowledge of the history of the people, a total lack of the sense of truth, and an unlimited capacity for imbibing beer and brandy—all qualities indispensable to the successful rabble-mover. That his mission was a dismal failure is due to the ignominious fact that he ran up a bill at his lodgings and could not pay it. To disarm suspicion he had taken an empty room in the house of a Turkish fisherman, which he had furnished with such things as he could obtain on credit of the Jewish dealers in the bazaars. Be it that he spent too much of his shameful income in the wine-shops, or that he was somewhat too liberal in making presents to various damsels of the town,—for he was an amorous

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swain and a great believer in back-stairs influence and petticoat policy,—the fact remains that his landlord pressed in vain for payment, and obtained at last from the lethargic glutton Haji Aziz a writ to eject. The kavass found a quantity of compromising correspondence, but the culprit, having got wind of the move, made good his escape whilst the search was in progress, and Widdin knew him no more. This happened in May 1876. The Bulgarians disclaimed indignantly every knowledge of the fellow's plans and doings, and no further attempt was made in the Winter Palace to stir up the rayahs of the town.

In the villages things did not go so smoothly. Particularly in the rural settlements along the River Lom many risings and retaliations took place, and one village (Hazanova, or some such name) was completely sacked and burnt by the soldiers in punishment for the murder of several Turkish families. In all cases such of the culprits as had escaped alive from the fury of the Moslem inhabitants were brought to Widdin, where a permanent court-martial, consisting of officers of unstained reputation and undoubted impartiality, had been established by the military commander, Mehemed Isset, who, perceiving the uselessness of moving the swipey pasha, had taken matters into his own hands. It must not be supposed

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that all the accused were indiscriminately convicted, which had been Haji Aziz's amiable intention; but each was accorded a patient hearing and a fair trial, and those found guilty of treason against the Empire, or of the murder of their Moslem neighbours, were sentenced to death, in which wise Turkey has acted no differently from what England has done in Ireland over and over again.

About a hundred Bulgarian peasants of the pashalik were waiting for their doom in the vaults of the fortress, in June 1876, and Mehemed Isset was nonplussed, for there was no hangman in the town. Christian and Mussulman alike declined the office, and at last the general was compelled, much against his inclination, to have recourse to those unclean animals, the Gypsies. A fellow was found who combined with the needful cruelty and heartlessness the equally necessary courage and physical strength,—a tall, brawny Gypsy of the dirty village Inova, who went by the nickname Ingliz Chingeni, that is, the English Gypsy. This appellation moved my curiosity to make some inquiries in 1877, and I found that undoubtedly the executioner of the rebellious Bulgarians was an Englishman by birth, having at one time belonged to a gang of Gypsies who had tramped Hampshire for many years. I saw

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in Inova one of his band, a handsome girl, who used to come to camp to exhibit her shapely limbs in voluptuous dances, for the delectation of the soldiers and her own profit, and who set many a susceptible heart on fire — mine, for one — by eyes blazing with passion. She, speaking a little Turkish, told me that Istanli[29] (that was the fellow's name) had crossed from England to France—in order to escape imprisonment for some serious offence—with the vendors of French onions who travel the South of England at certain times of the year, and that somehow he had found his way through Germany and Austria to Widdin, where he had joined the gang of Turkish Gypsies of which he was a prominent member in 1877.

In batches of four or five, escorted by soldiers with fixed bayonets, followed by the hangman carrying the crude gibbet and a decrepit-looking rope, and accompanied by the curses and execrations of the Moslem populace, the culprits were led through the streets with bound arms to an open space suitable for the performance, generally the one adjoining the clock-tower. Their sentences, in Turkish and Bulgarian, written in large characters, were affixed to their blouses. Without ceremony, and without the mercy of the English long-drop, they were hoisted to strangle midway between heaven and earth, sometimes with the

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most horrible convulsions of the unbound legs and contortions of the uncovered features. Two were generally hung on the gallows, the rest on convenient hooks in a wall. The corpses were allowed to remain exposed for some hours, and then thrust into a common hole. Istanli gloried in his occupation, but his fame was short-lived. The Government did not provide the rope, this being included in the hangman's pay, and as a result the avaricious fellow used all sorts of odd ends. One day the rope broke, and the body of the culprit, coming from a height of 12 or 15 feet, knocked him down, and he impaled himself on a knife which he carried under his blouse. He was thrust into an empty shed, where he died from want of attention, nobody in town being willing to lend him aid. The carcase of the loathsome fellow the soldiers flung into the culprit's pit, and not a person mourned over him, not even the members of his own gang, who had not benefited by the money paid to their miserly clansman. A sum deposited by him with a Jewish seraf was forfeited to Government, and part of it was offered by the generous Mehemed Isset to a Bulgarian school, in perfect good faith and honest intention, but was indignantly refused, as being contaminated blood-money.

That is the end of an individual who, about the

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year 1870, must have been well known to the rural dwellers in Hampshire. Another Gypsy took his place; but there were not many executions after Istanli's death—the business had ceased to flourish.

Peace and order had been restored in the pashalik when, at the end of June, Prince Milan of Servia, that spoilt and worthless pet of European diplomacy, commenced the first of his three wicked wars of aggression, which have placed his hapless country on the verge of bankruptcy.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE DEBUT OF THE GHAZI

Being an outline of the Servian war, especially with reference to Osman Pasha's first appearance in the domain of history.

July to December 1876.

"Thy voice is heard thro' rolling drums,
That beat to battle."

TENNYSON.

FOR some years past Servia had felt that curious itching of the skin which prompts a schoolboy to run a pin into his teacher's leg, knowing full well that the result will be a good pounding of the tickling hide. In other words, Prince Milan asked for a beating, and got it. But whereas the spirited lad takes his thrashing with a good heart, and complains not to petting parents or gruff guardians, the curled darling of Belgrad, assuming with much skill the rôle of the injured party, like the cur and the sneak that he was, lamented loudly, and invoked the kindly offices of his doting elders, Russia, Austria, and England.

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This is the course of the campaign in a few broad lines :—

On the 30th June, Milan, then in the camp at Deligrad on the Morava, declared war on his sovereign liege, Sultan Murad V., having previously demanded the annexation to Servia of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a piece of impertinence which could only lead to one result, bloodshed. On the following day the Servian forces crossed the Eastern frontier in three places, the Western in one column. Commander-in-chief was one Zach, whose reign came to an ingloriously premature end after the first reverses, when the Russian Tchernaieff, who had originally led only the eastern portion, was appointed in his stead. In the west commanded Olimpitch, who was thrust back across the Drina immediately and without much trouble, while a southern attempt of his corps ended in the Turkish victory of Novibazar (6th July). At Biélina, in the north-easterly corner of Bosnia, Olimpitch was decisively beaten on the 21st July. Tchernaieff's northern division was defeated at Isvor on the 20th July, resulting in a hasty retreat on Alexinatz. The Turks—having in the commencement been somewhat unprepared, unripe in plans, halting and blundering in their execution—had placed their most accredited generals in the field against

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the rebellious vassal: Abdul Kerim Pasha as commander-in-chief; Mehemed Ali Pasha, a German renegade, against Tchernaieff's column, Moukhtar Pasha (later of Kars fame) on the Drina, Suleiman Pasha (afterwards the hero of Shipka) against Montenegro; and in the north, against a Servian corps threatening Widdin by way of Saitchar, a divisional general of thirty-nine summers, by name Osman Nuri, which had not before appeared in the annals of history, but which was destined to set the world ablaze, and crown itself with a glory that will last through ages untold.

A word as to the antecedents of this black-bearded and sunburnt man, corpulent, taciturn, rude-spoken, of personal inertness, but endowed with mental activity and energy of the highest order, and with a stupendous latent power appearing to a discriminating observer in keen eyes and firmly-set lips, in abrupt gestures and a demeanour wholly innocent of the petty forms of politeness.

Born of well-to-do parents in Tokat, Asia Minor, in 1837, his handsome features gave evidence of Arab blood. Having passed through the Military Academy of Stamboul he received his lieutenancy (at that time only a warrant), and fought with the cavalry under Omar Pasha in the

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Crimean War, distinguishing himself at Eupatoria on the 21st March 1855. Henceforth his promotion was rapid and his experience manifold and extensive. The Servian campaign he commenced as a ferik (general of division), and ended as a mushir, the highest military grade of the Ottoman service. Twelve months later he had received the crown—ay, the halo in the eyes of every Osmanli—of the much-coveted title Ghazi, the Victorious.[80]

Osman was at that time a devout and orthodox Moslem, but not a bigot. In his patriotism, however, he was narrow-minded, laying bare, at every opportunity—and delighting to do so—a violent dislike of foreigners. On one occasion I was the unhappy object of his ire on account of my Western birth.

Up to 1877 he had held himself aloof from politics. Had he died in 1878 he would have gone down to posterity as one of the greatest and noblest characters in modern history. He chose to prostitute his fair fame of a soldier, staining, with the good old Ottoman taint of corruption, the glorious record comprised in the one word "Plevna."

This *débutant* in the arena of fame justified his sovereign's choice by the victory of Isvor already mentioned, and on the 7th August he gave further proof of ability and courage by beating the enemy

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at Saitchar in a thorough and decisive manner. Simultaneously his troops stormed and occupied Kniajevatz. The districts of Kniajevatz and Tcherna Riéka received heavy punishment at the hands of the victors. In the south, the Servian main corps, under Tchernaieff in person, was also thrust back and retired on Deligrad. The Turkish invasion of Servia commenced, and on all points the victors pursued the straight road to Belgrad. For their initial lassitude and dilatoriness the Osmanlis made up by abundant energy, undoubted ability, and the customary courage of the Ottoman soldiery. A word of praise must be given to the Servians for their tenacious resistance; but it was clear that the militia of the young Principality (for the army was no better), constantly augmented by raw levies, was no match for the experienced and highly-trained troops of the Crescent.

Between the 21st and the 29th August Tchernaieff was daily compelled to fight the aggressors on both sides of the Morava; but although in his grandiloquent despatches he celebrated each encounter as a victory, yet did the Turks encroach more and more upon Servian territory, driving the Russian braggard and his ill-trained crew before them. That the Montenegrins —who were now also at war with Turkey—had gained some successes (notably at Urbitza, 28th

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July, and Kutché, 13th August) affected not the issue so far as Servia was concerned.

On the 14th September an armistice was concluded at the instigation of Austria and England; but hostilities were resumed before the truce was a fortnight old (27th September), both parties accusing each other of having treacherously broken the convention.

During the temporary lull Servia made strenuous exertions to meet the oncoming storm, aided and abetted by her patroness, Russia. The latter, having already lavishly helped with men, money, and sustenance at the commencement of the campaign, now sent three million roubles in bullion, scores of officers,[81] hundreds of volunteers for the ranks, and whole train-cargoes of raiment, boots, medicaments, and small-arms.

With much inflated bathos Tchernaieff gave it out that he had drawn the Turks into Servian territory on purpose, that they were now in a trap and at his mercy, that all he had to do was to seize and capture them. The battle of Alexinatz was the Turkish response to this ridiculous piece of bombast.

On the 28th October this the most important engagement of the war took place, in the neighbourhood of Alexinatz, which town and camp, with a heroic garrison, Tchernaieff had abandoned to its fate before the truce and the Turks had invested.

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Now he returned to raise the siege, and a bloody encounter, fought by both sides with conspicuous bravery, was the result, ending in the rout of the Servians. The victor was Osman Pasha, who was made mushir for this exploit by a grateful sovereign. Two days after this action the Turks stormed and conquered Alexinatz and Djunis; simultaneously the Servians evacuated Deligrad, their central camp.

Servia was completely beaten, exhausted, at the end of her resources, at the mercy of her opponents. The road to the capital was open, and nothing remained to be done for the victors but to pursue it. Luckily for the embryo kingdom the Czar, Alexander II., despatched from Livadia on the 31st October, the day after the storming of Djunis, a significant telegram, which caused Turkey—peaceable, inclined to be generous in the flush of victory, afraid of European interference—to consent to another truce. This was not broken, and led subsequently (28th February 1877) to peace, the terms of which granted to Servia the totally unmerited *status quo ante.*[32]

In this war Widdin was the base of operations for the northern division of the Turks, and its leader, Osman, returned thither in the beginning of November 1876. Henceforth, and until he started for Plevna and immortal fame, in July 1877, he

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resided in the pasha's serai as military commander of the district. In this wise the name of the Virgin Fortress will always be associated with that of the greatest hero of whom Ottoman history can boast.

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CHAPTER XV

THE LULL OF DECEPTION

Giving a short account of a short and delusive interregnum of peace.

January to April 1877.

"A most base and vile-concluded peace."
SHAKESPEARE.

EUROPE was at peace again; but no sensible man deceived himself: the lull was that before the storm. Russia, Roumania, Servia, Montenegro, Greece, Turkey, England, Austria, all prepared strenuously for the bursting of the thunder-cloud. The whole East was one vast arsenal in which armies of labourers were working overtime; even the peaceful Occident became contaminated by the truly Napoleonic malady, love of bloodshed, which hung in the heavy air; and the makers of deadly weapons on Clyde and Tyne, Ruhr and Rhine, Adria, Bosphorus, and Baltic, rejoiced exceedingly.

Abdul Kerim returned to Shumla, Moukhtar and Mehemed Ali were called to Stamboul; Suleiman remained on the Montenegrin frontier, and

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Osman was left in command of the West. By his recent exploits, he had become to the Ottoman nation the pride of the past, the pillar of the present, the hope of the future; he was the flower of the army, the mainstay of the Empire. For him all hearts beat, on him all eyes were turned in anxiety for the coming life-and-death struggle.

By degrees he concentrated, in and around Widdin, the whole of the forces which had operated against Eastern Servia during the recent campaign. There he had, in December 1876, sixty battalions; of these, sixteen were detached in January, and sent to Eastern Bulgaria, much to his chagrin; thus there were forty-four left, which constituted the Widdin army (by which name the corps was henceforth known), and were distributed as follows:— Thirty-one in Widdin, four along the frontiers (Rakovitza, Bregovo, Adlié, Flortin, Artzar, Biélogradchik, Berkovitza); three in Lom Palankah; three in Rahova; three near Beshti, on the spot where the Isker flows into the Danube.

Osman's divisional generals were Adil, Hassan Sabri, and Mehemed Isset Pashas, the latter continued to be also commandant of Widdin proper; the chief of staff was Tahir Pasha. The commander-in-chief of the Turkish forces in Europe was Abdul Kerim in Shumla. Minister of War was at that period Redif, one of the greatest scoundrels that

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ever ruined the chances of a brave army and capable leaders by negligence and corruption. Sultan was now — since the last of the internal storms in Stamboul, during August — Abdul Hamid II., a young man, well-meaning, but weak and inexperienced, mistaken in his projects, blundering in their execution, deceived in and by his councillors.

Osman exerted himself to the utmost to bring his fine army, experienced and victorious, up to the highest pitch of efficiency of which Ottoman administration will admit. That he succeeded to the measure attainable under such woeful circumstances, despite the machinations of traitors, the hesitancy of cowards, the dilatoriness of fat-bellied sluggards, despite the Redifs, the Mahmoud Damads, and all that crew, rotten to the core, must be placed to his credit as a performance quite as wonderful as his later glorious exploits on the green hills of Plevna, whence he blazed forth the thunder of his "Thus far and no farther" against the ruthless invader, and spread his fame over the inhabited globe. But then he was a man of an iron-made mental constitution, and where he planted his foot there never grew grass again.

Of the thirty-one battalions which now garrisoned Widdin, in addition to the fort artillery, only a small portion lived in town; the majority resided in the three commodious canvas cities on the surround-

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ing hills. These were models of comfort; the internal administration was perfect, the health excellent, the troops were high-spirited and thoroughly disciplined, the supply of necessaries was on the whole satisfactory. The weather became dry and fine in April, and henceforth sojourn in these picturesque and beautifully kept camps was so pleasurable and wholesome, both to body and to mind, that I—who arrived there on the 23rd April, a day before the declaration of war—look back upon it with delight, tempered with keen regret as I breathe the atmosphere, polluted in every sense, of crowded city lanes.

The crude pontoon bridge between Calafat and Widdin had been broken up in 1875, when Roumania had evinced an unmistakable sympathy with the rebels across the water. But up to the day of Russia's proclamation of war there was frequent boat communication between the two towns. Only a small detachment of infantry was stationed at Calafat, and there was but little artillery. The Roumanian and Turkish officers entertained each other frequently. My former comrade and present correspondent, Dr. Charles Ryan, then a surgeon of the Widdin army, now a physician in Melbourne, his native city, tells of a dinner given to him and others by the officers of the Calafat garrison; of immense quantities of wine, proffered with a view

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that it was not difficult to divine, and consumed without leading to the result aimed at; for the young doctor and his comrades were wide-awake, and the more they were plied the less they let out.

In this period falls Osman Pasha's ball, already mentioned, which created such a sensation in Widdin. It took place in the serai in the beginning of March, and was meant to celebrate the short-lived peace with Servia. Popular excitement in Widdin was intense anent this event, the like of which had not been heard of, ever since the weather-beaten city-walls had frowned upon those marshes of fog, fever, and frouziness.[88]

More than two months had elapsed when I entered the precincts of the town for the first time, and then Osman's ball was still the topic of excited comment, and continued so until the Roumanian shells and the earth-shaking responses of Widdin's heavy ordnance guided public excitement into a different and rather more formidable groove. Sooth to say Osman had to send to Crayova, in Roumania, for the cold supper collation, a distance of more than 50 miles. This simple fact will give the reader a notion of the utter absence of civilised accommodation in Widdin.

To this brief interregnum of peace belongs the first and only Turkish parliament, which held its

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initiatory meeting in Stamboul on the 19th March 1877, and came to an inglorious end within a twelve-month. The election caused much excitement in Widdin and the neighbouring villages, and some bad blood, which it required all the tact of Osman, Mehemed Isset, the Austrian Consul, and other well-disposed persons, to allay; for the incapable pasha, Haji Aziz, had become an absolute nonentity since Osman's vigorous hand had grasped the reins of government in the pashalik. The members for the sanjak were a Turkish gentleman and a Bulgarian trader, both well-to-do residents of the town.

When I arrived in Widdin the air was thick with rumours of war. The excitement was intense, and speculation ran high with respect to Roumania's attitude. For as to Russia's hostile intention there could be no shadow of a doubt, while Servia was known to be still heavily smarting under, and incapacitated by the vigorous blows just dealt out to her. On the 24th April the Czar, Alexander II., declared war upon the Sultan Abdul Hamid II., and when the news reached camp there ensued a scene of indescribable frenzy and enthusiasm. A few days later Roumania's secret convention with Russia became known, by virtue of which the troops of the latter were accorded passage through, and sustenance in the former's domain. All doubt was

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at an end. We were at war with at least two nations, and the guns of the river-terraces were trained to bear upon the treacherous neighbour across the road.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE CURSE OF COMPULSORY IDLENESS

Dealing with the first period of the Russo-Turkish War—from the outbreak of hostilities to Osman Pasha's departure for the scene of action—so far as it concerns the Widdin army.

April to July 1877.

"When was age so cramm'd with menace? madness? written, spoken lies?"
TENNYSON.

TOWARDS the end of April the numerous glasses and telescopes constantly directed on Calafat discerned that troops and guns were coming in. There was much activity on the Roumanian bank: masked batteries and other earthworks were erected, the peaceful inhabitants were turned out, streets and houses seemed full of men in uniform.

In view of a possible invasion of Roumania Osman had collected the materials for a pontoon bridge, which was never utilised, thanks to the council of war in Stamboul.

The Danube islands between Widdin and

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Calafat had for many years been a bone of contention to Turkey and her vassal, and that may have been the reason that the fertile land was uninhabited and uncultivated. The reader will remember that in 1853 Omar's first move was to occupy these islets. In 1877 they remained deserted: Osman did not seize them because the wirepullers would not permit it, and the Roumanians were afraid to take the initiative; in fact, their original convention with sanguine and overbearing Russia—which was for the Principality merely one of passive support—probably rendered a decisive step of that description prohibitive.

It has been shown in the case of the Crimean War that a double position like that of Widdin–Calafat is practically impregnable, even to a modern army. Osman's clear duty would have been to seize, garrison, and fortify Calafat on the very day of the declaration of war; at that period he could have done so by a *coup de main*, almost without firing a shot. The Aulic Council of Stamboul, by its scandalous veto, flew into the face of history and experience. Turkey had several such twin positions: Rahova–Piket, Nikopoli–Turnu Magurele, Sistova–Simnitza, Rustchuk–Giurgevo, Turtukai–Oltenitza, Tultcha–Ismail. It is painful to reflect, in the light of events, what a tremendous influence only one such double-barrelled stronghold

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—Widdin–Calafat, for choice—would have had on the war (even granting the Russian invasion *via* Sistova) in the hands of an energetic commander. Never has campaign been conducted with greater supineness and timidity on the part of the supreme command, with a more flagrant want of common-sense and ordinary skill, than that of 1877 by Turkey. Osman was not the only general bound and gagged by the Incapable of the capital: every commander of division, corps, or army was fettered by a cumbersome chain which had its other end in the seraskierat on the Bosphorus, or worse, behind the curtains of the zenana.

On the 8th May the first shot was fired. There has been much controversy as to which party actually broke the peace. I happened to be in town on leave of absence on that day, and from one of the river-side batteries I witnessed the affair. The challenge was a blank shot fired by the Turks from Yeni Tabiya, to which the Roumanians responded immediately by a terrific discharge, and soon all the batteries on both sides of the river, as well as the monitors, spit fire amid such crashing and scintillation and hissing of white trails high up in the air, that the whole landscape seemed to be in a blaze of lightning, a continuous roar of thunder, a whirlwind of evil-smelling clouds.[84]

After the 8th May the shelling was renewed

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every second or third day, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for hours. The 8th and 24th May, the 3rd and 8th June, witnessed the hottest cannonades. On the second of the dates named Prince Charles of Roumania was in Calafat, accompanied, among others, by Mr. Archibald Forbes of *Daily News* fame. Towards the middle of June the shelling grew lax, the leaders on both sides recognising its futility, and it ceased altogether in July, not to be resumed until the end of the year, with the Roumanian investment of Widdin on the land side.

The material effect of two months' shelling on both banks was practically *nil.* There were frequent fires in the two towns, but none assumed serious dimensions. In Widdin the soldiers quenched the conflagrations, for want of a fire-brigade. The damage done to the fortifications was always immediately repaired; for we had plenty of engineers, mechanics, and workmen. About a hundred persons were killed or wounded; there was not a whole pane in the town; a few shaky minarets tumbled into back-yards, and dilapidated hovels of Tsintsars and Gypsies collapsed into heaps of dust and rubbish. In Calafat the damage was even less, since that town stands on a higher level than its neighbour, and the Widdin gunners were thus placed at a serious disadvantage. No attack was undertaken or attempted by either belligerent.

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But if the visible damage was inconsiderable, the harm done to the prosperity of the town was great. Trade and industry were at a standstill. The courts were busy with applications for moratorium. Nearly one-half of the inhabitants emigrated with all such belongings as they could carry or cart away. The wrecked houses were not repaired, and the once busy streets and bazaars presented a woeful aspect. Cash became so scarce that nine transactions out of ten were effected by means of promissory notes, subsequently discounted for a quarter of their face-value or less. I know for a fact that an accepted ten lira draft on Osman Pasha was gladly sold for three liras in gold. Mutual distrust was rampant, necessaries rose to an enormous price; even well-to-do folk were practically starving. Such is the penalty of war.

Amid these distressing circumstances Osman caused the administration of the law to be carried on with firmness and impartial justice, and when he had departed Mehemed Isset followed worthily in his footsteps. What life in the town would have been like if Haji Aziz had been allowed the upper hand it is difficult to conjecture.

It was the Bulgarians that emigrated. They established themselves in the villages of the sanjak, or in vast encampments of mud-huts and ragged tents on the surrounding hills, in either case beyond

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shell-range. Happily the weather was fine throughout. Turks and Jews stayed behind, trusting in the mushir to protect their lives and their properties.

The many war-correspondents (German, British, and American) who had repaired to Widdin, in most cases even before the Czar's proclamation, were sent away by the mushir shortly after the outbreak of hostilities; and with them departed, unfortunately, prolific sources of gold and silver. Among the Englishmen on whom fell Osman's edict of expulsion were Nicholas Leader, who died in the Shipka Pass a little later, and Frank Power, who was afterwards British Consul in Khartoum, and, with Colonel Stewart, was killed by the Arabs.

In the meantime the invasion of Bulgaria by Russia's hordes had commenced. Sistova fell on the 27th June,[85] the Simnitza pontoon bridge was built and the Danube crossed (3rd July), Biéla, Tirnova, and Selvi were occupied (7th to 9th July), Gourko reached the northern foot of the Balkans (11th July), and Nikopoli was threatened by an attack of Krüdener's corps.

Osman Pasha and his magnificent army, brought up to the highest pitch of perfection through daily warlike exercise on the hills, were condemned to idleness by the cowardice and hesitancy, maybe the treachery, of the wirepullers in Stamboul. Vainly did Osman urge immediate action; vainly did he

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send impatient queries and sensible proposals by wire, letter, and special messenger; vainly did he submit elaborate plans, first (in May and June) for an invasion of Roumania, then (end of June and beginning of July) for an offensive movement Danube downward. The council of war, composed of incapables, sluggards, and traitors, ignored his suggestions, vetoed his propositions, and left him without replies to pressing telegraphic inquiries.

The troops became disheartened on knowing the country to be invaded without a serious stand being made by the really fine Ottoman army, while they themselves had not yet fired a single riflė-shot in grim earnest. Of the many sources of demoralisation in warfare, idleness is surely the most prolific and the most formidable. Had the lazy looking-on lasted for a month longer, Osman's army would have degenerated to the extent of becoming practically useless for campaigning purposes; for a defeat is in many cases more degrading to the idle partisan-onlooker than to the beaten.

At last, on the 8th July, it was rumoured that a move was in contemplation; on the 11th the mushir's plan was communicated to the officers; on the 12th march-orders were given out; at dawn on the 13th Osman's expeditionary force, consisting of 19 battalions, 6 squadrons, and 54 guns, met at the appointed place of tryst, the spot where the Artzar

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road crosses the outer *enceinte;* and a few hours before noon the column started eastward.

Mehemed Isset was left in command of Widdin, having at his orders 12 battalions (a complete division) in the town and the camps, 3 in Lom Palankah, and 4 along the Servian frontier, a total of 19 battalions, with but one squadron of cavalry and one battery of field artillery—truly striking instances of Redif's and Abdul Kerim's atrocious arrangements! The 6 battalions in Rahova and Beshti remained at Osman's disposal.

The mushir's intention was to march straight on Nikopoli, to save it from Krüdener and collapse. Thanks to the tardy consent of the council of war, he was too late to rescue that important stronghold, and the situation resolved itself into a race for Plevna and undying glory.

To this period of deceptive lull belongs an adventure of which I was an anxious witness, although, through the envy of fate, not a participator. As it is an amusing little story I have no hesitation to incorporate it with my narrative, to supply the comic element which, so dramatists tell us, is much needed in gloomy records of strife; and since the objective of the exploit is of world-wide and eternal importance, I am justified in allotting a special chapter to the conquest of Roumania's Petticoat.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE FIGHT FOR THE PETTICOAT

Being a record of heroic struggle and brilliant conquest.

June 1877.

"Again ye come, ye hovering Forms! I find ye,
As early to my clouded sight ye shone!"
GOETHE (BAYARD TAYLOR).

THE company of infantry to which I belonged was unexpectedly ordered on river-guard duty one beautiful June morning. Leaving regretfully our healthy hill-camp at Inova we tramped across the downs to a low-lying, marshy spot on the Danube bank, about three miles upwards of Widdin, and here the incident took place which the battalion poetaster made into an epic that had an unexampled "run" by the bivouac fires. In truth, the little drama enacted on the Roumanian bank, which I watched through my glasses from the Turkish shore with heart beating high, was the camp-talk for many weeks afterwards.

I was at that period a second lieutenant, and with me in the same company were two lieutenants,

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both about my own age (18): one, Jack Seymour, an English adventurer; the other, Ibrahim Tereb, a Turk from Dédé Agach.

Our captain distributed his seven half-squads in such a manner that his troop commanded a one-mile stretch of the river. In this wise there were seven small bivouacs, separated by intervals of 200 yards each; and as we expected to stay for at least a week before we were relieved, we made our encampments as comfortable as the circumstances would allow.

In front of Seymour's squad was a dense jungle of reeds and bulrushes, washed by the majestic Danube, which is here over a mile wide. The opposite Roumanian shore, green, flat, and fertile, appeared to be utterly deserted and devoid of human habitation. On the Turkish side there was, 500 yards inland, a dirty Bulgarian hamlet called Katova, deserted by its terror-stricken residents; beyond, a range of bare green hills. Between the two shores a flat, uninhabited island, covered with a rank growth of shrubs and wild-flowers, bred waterfowl in undisturbed fecundity. The dark blue sky lent its colour to the waters, which splashed and murmured melodiously among the weeds; where the current flowed swifter in broad channels the crest of gentle waves was crowned with countless glittering diamonds.

Blue and green were the only hues of the scene, and so wearisome became the endless green of the

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landscape to the vision that the eyes alighted instinctively on a speck of brilliant red just opposite, which, examined through the glasses, was discovered to be a flag, planted there by the Roumanians probably for the purpose of measuring the range of the Calafat batteries.

High overhead a lark sang a jubilant strain, the wild ducks uttered now and then a discordant cry, and from afar came the lazy peal of a high-toned Roumanian chapel-bell. But suddenly the boom of the heavy Widdin ordnance, mingled with the harsher crack of the enemy's Krupp guns in the Calafat batteries, dispelled the illusion—engendered by the sleepy summer noon silence—of deepest concord and perfect peace; and the sound waves carried the ugly word "war" on the wings of an indolent wind across the sunlit landscape.

The purpose for which the company had been sent to this deserted spot was to prevent, firstly, a Roumanian raid on the Turkish bank; secondly, the clandestine communication between the enemy and the numerous Bulgarian spies and traitors in the villages. There was apparently no danger of the former, for the most searching investigation of the opposite shore through the glasses did not reveal a single specimen of the rebellious vassal's armed sons.

The half-squads slumbered in their bivouacs,

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in secluded spots sheltered against the glare of the mid-day sun by a shrub-overgrown ridge. From each party two sentries gazed sleepily at the blue waters.

Strolling to the river's edge Jack Seymour made a discovery: a well-trimmed fishing-boat, Roumanian by her build, had wedged herself firmly in the bulrushes, and stowed in her bottom was a net of fish, the silver sheen of which presented a most inviting appearance to the eyes of one who was always hungry. Two pairs of oars, tied in a bundle, lay across the seats.

He hailed his sergeant:—

"Murad! there's a good dinner for us, my man! She must have broken loose from her moorings on the other side and drifted across with the current. How are we to get her?"

"It is deeper among the rushes than you think, sir, and the pike has a nasty habit of biting your toes. The best plan would be to swim around the edge of the jungle and row her ashore in the open space yonder."

"Off with the clothes, Murad!" said Seymour, suiting the action to the words.

They walked into the shallow water on a spot free from reeds, struck out, swam around the jungle and climbed into the boat, which was soon high and dry ashore; and in less than ten minutes the fish boiled in the copper.

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The captain returned just in time to partake of the unexpected meal, and Seymour suggested a raid on the Roumanian shore. The former examined the opposite bank carefully through his telescope; no human being was visible, but a few sheep grazing, undisturbed by the Oriental Question, on the fat meadow-land washed by the river promised an easy prey. Seymour was bent upon this undertaking, from which he expected excitement; his persistence finally caused the captain to forget that he was acting contrary to orders, and he gave his consent.

The expedition consisted of Jack Seymour, as chief; Ibrahim Tereb, as second in command; the former's sergeant Murad, who took the helm, being an accomplished boatsman from one of the Danube towns; four men, experts with the oars, as rowers; four good marksmen with loaded rifles as marines; and one man as look-out in the prow—twelve all told.

The captain stationed three men on an eminence a few hundred yards inland, whence a long stretch of the river could be overlooked on both sides, and any Roumanian craft coming from above or below could be espied and signalled to the expeditionary party. It was arranged that at a certain sign with an improvised signal flag the boat was to return at once. Seymour gave his glasses to one of the men who faced the stern,

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instructing him to keep them constantly on the look-out party upon the hill-top; Tereb, with the captain's telescope, searched the Roumanian bank as the boat proceeded.

In this wise they rowed swiftly across the river. The fresh breeze blowing over the water, the glorious sunlight, the slight rolling motion of the craft, the confidence in strong arms, swift legs, trusty weapons, intoxicated the men; they were in exuberant spirits, and wished for nothing more than an encounter with the faithless neighbour across the road.

They landed without difficulty. Four men were kept back as sentries to the boat; one of them had the telescope upon the look-out on the other side. The rest proceeded cautiously inland until they came to the pasture ground, and here the chase after the terror-stricken sheep supplied the first element of excitement in the war. There was a panic in the enemy's ranks: the sheepish Roumanians retreated in wildest disorder, and the nimble-minded, swift-limbed Turks started merrily in pursuit of the routed foe. Seymour had taken care to scrutinise the surroundings: not a human being was visible; there did not seem to be a habitation within a radius of two miles or more; the country was as still and dead as a churchyard, and quite as fertile and rank of vegetation.

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Two sheep were caught and carried to the boat, where they were stowed under the seats with tied legs; the others had scampered away in all directions, and were soon lost to sight. The rest of the booty consisted of a miserable, fluttering stray chicken, and a petticoat discovered spread over a hedge to dry — probably the property of some nomadic fisherman's wife.

But Seymour longed for further spoil and glory, and his eyes caught the red flag of the Roumanian gunners, about half a mile away. "What a splendid trophy!" he thought, and that idea nearly cost him and his party their lives.

"Volunteers for the flag!" he called out, and all hands went up at once.

He selected the sergeant and two men; the rest returned to the boat, where Tereb was now supreme in command, which put an extra inch to his stature, a shade of orange to his bilious, yellow-green complexion, and an additional 50 per cent of dignity and importance to his bearing. He felt his sterile lips, stroked contentedly the moustache which was waiting to be born in the dark ante-chambers of the world, and gave several unnecessary and grandiloquent orders.

The would-be despoilers of the virgin state's honour proceeded gaily to their goal, forgetful, in their boisterous hilarity, of the fact that the

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Calafat gunners knew the range of the flag to a foot.

The first adventure they encountered bore the shape of a young and sportive bull. This gentleman appeared quite suddenly upon the scene and charged at them; and this was the first action at close quarters in the Russo-Turkish War. The Roumanians, represented by a bull, had the better of it, and the habitually victorious arms of the Crescent, represented by four young men who could dare and die for their faith and their Sultan, but were not prepared for ferocious cattle, took to their heels. There was a lively stampede across the meadows towards the river, and it is the painful duty of the chronicler of this veracious story to record that Lieutenant Seymour's retreat assumed a somewhat hasty character—in fact, he arrived head foremost at the bottom of a little embankment, his feet describing a graceful semi-ellipse. The bull jumped after him, missed him, and broke a leg. He could not get up, and as the flight had had the result that they had approached the landing-place within a few yards, the men soon had him fastened to the stern of the boat by a rope tied to his waist.

The chief object had still to be accomplished. The Roumanian bull was in ignominious servitude, roaring with rage and pain; but the Roumanian flag fluttered proudly in the breeze. Again they

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started, and this time they reached their destination without being intercepted by the enemy. The axe brought by one of the men divided the staff half-way: the top with the flag was the trophy of the Turks; the stump stood bare, disgraced, forsaken, shorn of its crowning glory, a sad wreck of decapitated grandeur.

Seymour felt that such a stirring event called for a speech. Holding the captured flag high above his head he commenced :—

"Brethren in arms! To-day we have gained the first laurels; and the good genius who watches over the fate of our glorious country has signified his approval of our courage and daring in favouring our plans, and crowning them with brilliant success. Soon he will give us a fresh and even more striking proof of his good-will——"

But he was interrupted by a shrill whistle coming from the boat, a prearranged sign, and a hasty glance through the glasses revealed the outlook on the Turkish bank giving vehemently the signal for immediate return.

"Comrades," said Seymour, with a hurry that sounded somewhat out of tune to the stately solemnity of the opening oration, "reluctantly we must go back. Duty calls us. I shall finish my speech at a more convenient opportunity."

They started, and hardly had they tramped a

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hundred yards when a hissing noise was heard overhead, and a shell struck the very spot on which Seymour had just begun his maiden speech. It exploded and threw up a spreading sheaf of dust, like a miniature volcanic eruption. Once more a shrill whistle was heard, and the next moment a clattering rifle-discharge inland sped their feet to indecent haste. Breathless they arrived at the bank; excited voices admonished them to hurry up. They hauled and pushed the recumbent bull into the river, and were off even before they had collected their senses. Only when they were fairly out on the water, with the lumbering bullock—who had been allowed plenty of rope, so as not to drag the stern down—swimming behind with the grace of a sportive porpoise, snorting and spitting water through his nostrils, did they perceive the full extent of the fourfold danger that threatened them: two large boats crowded with soldiers, and rowed each by a dozen oars, came up Calafat-way; another boat shot swiftly down from a Roumanian hamlet a few miles up-river;[86] shells were hurled at them from the battery above Calafat, and the striking-place of each was uncomfortably nearer to the mark than that of its predecessor; one rebounded from the surface, and fell again in dangerous proximity to the boat, so that the spray shot out into the air descended upon them, and the bull broke out into a terrific roar; and,

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lastly, a small detachment of Roumanian gendarmes, distinguishable by ugly helmets of the Prussian *Pickelhaube* shape, appeared on the crest of the embankment, and discharged a volley at them.

"Pull for your lives, boys!" shouted Seymour, and then "Fire!" to the men with rifles.

Feeling that each backward shot gave an impetus to the forward motion of the boat, he cried: "Fire away, men; do not spare the ammunition!" To the rowers: "Keep her steady, so that we can aim!" And to the man at the helm: "Starboard, Murad—her nose on that hill-top!"

The Calafat boats were too far away to be dangerous, and had to contend against the tide; but the other craft, floating with the current, had approached to less than a mile, and its inmates opened fire.

A shout of "Allah!" went up from the riflemen: one of the gendarmes, shot through the breast, had tumbled down the embankment head foremost, and they could hear the clatter of his musket as it struck the stones at the bottom of the little hollow. But his comrades now committed a blunder: they abandoned their raised point of vantage, descended, and ran to the water's edge, whence their bullets passed harmlessly over the heads of the boat party. The oarsmen pulled so that streams of perspiration rolled over their faces. Soon they were out of danger of the gendarmes' rifles; but the upper boat was now

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within a thousand yards, and another shell had struck the water in the wake of the Turkish craft.

"The gunboats are coming to our rescue!" shouted Tereb, who was on outlook duty with the telescope, and, true enough, the two Turkish monitors, stationed off Widdin, whose steam was always up, night and day, had started in pursuit of the Roumanian row-boats.

"What a ridiculous fuss!" said Seymour to the helmsman. "All for a couple of sheep, a moribund bullock, and a second-hand petticoat!"

They could now see the figures in the upper boat: eight oarsmen, eight riflemen, an officer, a man in fisherman's attire at the helm, and two men in the prow with something that looked like a blunderbuss, but was really a kind of *mitrailleuse*, used at that time by both the Russians and the Roumanians, and now obsolete.

"Wave the flag to them!" shouted Seymour, and the red banner greeted the pursuers insultingly. The staff was fastened in the hole provided for the mast.

The other boats had struck inshore, being no match for the monitors. The latter, vigorously shelled by the Calafat batteries, fired on the parties as they were hurriedly landing; the heavy fort guns of Widdin discharged furiously across the river. In bold curves, with white trails, the projectiles flew

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over the water, and with the frequency and swiftness of the exchange it looked almost as if the two towns were bound together by an airy and graceful superstructure of thin arches.

"Dear me," said Seymour, "this is getting somewhat uncomfortable! Perhaps they will order the Black Sea fleet to steam up and join in the fun."

A furious volley came from the Roumanian boat, and the bullets perforated the flag.

"Show them the petticoat!" he shouted. "That will annoy them more than anything else."

The harmless, necessary underskirt was fixed to the staff, and the emblem of the "eternal feminine" fluttered proudly in the breeze, in company with that of the embryo kingdom's violated honour.

The shells no longer struck the water; for the Calafat gunners, perceiving through their telescopes the Roumanian boat approaching, were afraid of hitting their countrymen. Another volley came from the hostile craft; both flag and skirt were riddled by bullets.

"Allah be praised!" cried Tereb, delighted, "they have dishonoured their own petticoat!"

A third volley broke the top of the staff into splinters, and Seymour took his coat off—he felt uncomfortably warm. The gendarmes howled, half with impotent rage, half with expected triumph, and

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the bull towing in the wake of the boat, almost strangled by the rope, spluttered and bellowed like a misshapen Neptune in a fit.

Only 300 yards separated the boats now. The Roumanians had but to follow the torrent; the Turks had to cut through it with a heavy burden at the tail, and were thus at a disadvantage.

Tereb wiped his brow. "We shall be annihilated in another minute with that infernal machine of theirs," he said, thinking what an ugly corpse he would make without a moustache.

"Pull, boys! Blaze away at the men in the bows!" cried Seymour.

The riflemen aimed steadily and discharged simultaneously. One of the Roumanians fell lifeless and head foremost into the water, and their boat gave an ugly lurch. His place was taken by another. The pursuers gained upon the fugitives with every minute.

As yet there had been no casualties in the Turkish boat; but the next Roumanian discharge sent a bullet through the arm of one of the riflemen.

With a heavy heart Seymour gave the order:—"Cut the bull adrift."

This was done, and the poor brute floated down stream.

Freed of this cumbersome burden they increased

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a little in speed; but the Roumanians had now put a fifth pair of oars on and still gained upon them. One of the Turkish scull-blades was shattered by a bullet, and another rifleman was disabled by a gaping wound in the shoulder. The Turkish boat was too heavily laden for her size and build, and soon it became apparent to Seymour that all they could do was to save their lives, that spoil and booty were out of question.

"Throw the sheep overboard!" he commanded. The two animals were pitched out, and being tied, were drowned. In the confusion the chicken escaped from its confinement in the locker, and fluttered into the water. The lightened craft cut swifter through the strong current under the strenuous exertion of the oarsmen.

The boats were now only a hundred yards apart, but a rescue party—which included my humble personality—had appeared on the Turkish shore in the shape of the whole company, drawn out in single line along the bank. When the Roumanian boat had come within easy range it was greeted by a well-fired company volley which disabled two men. Seymour heard the Roumanian officer's command, the boat swayed round and was rowed back towards the opposite shore, but before it departed they fired once more on the Turkish craft, and shot the flag-staff right in two. The upper part with the flag

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and the petticoat toppled over into the water, and only an ignominious little stump remained; but one of the oarsmen caught the floating garment dexterously with his blade, it detached itself from the stick, and was triumphantly hauled into the boat.

They arrived at last, breathless and perspiring, and brought as sole booty and trophy of this daring exploit, of this the first encounter at close quarters in the great Russo-Turkish War, a perforated petticoat of dirty white flannel, with a ragged green hem, and a shiny black calico-patch on the site of the seat.

This glorious relic was drawn for by the members of the expedition, and well I remember the excitement when it fell to the lot of Lieutenant Tereb. Sentimentally and amorously he presented it, when his next half-day of leave came round, to a woman with whom he fancied himself to be in love,—a half-caste Austrian waitress at the dingiest of all the dingy little *cabarets* of Widdin. She used it to wipe her cups with. Finally, reduced to a mere rag, it was pasted to the window, to amend and hide its cracks and holes, and ever afterwards the place was known by the Sign of the Petticoat.

In this inglorious position the original owners found the sacred relic when—eight months later, in February 1878, after the armistice—the Roumanian soldiers occupied the town.

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CHAPTER XVIII

A SPELL OF FAIR WEATHER

Dealing with the second period of the Russo-Turkish War—from Osman Pasha's departure for the scene of action until the investment of Plevna,—so far as it concerns the town and garrison of Widdin.

July to November 1877.

"His country's war-songs thrill his ears."
TENNYSON.

THE departure of Osman Pasha and his force toward the rising sun confirmed the inhabitants of the pashalik in the belief that the district would after all be spared the horrors of war. The cessation of the senseless artillery combat between the two towns, the continued inactivity of the Roumanians at Calafat, and of the Servians across the border, the knowledge that the Russians had contemptuously declined Prince Charles's offer of active help, the report of Osman's brilliant victories at Plevna on July 20th and 30th, all tended to restore confidence and quiet. Many of the Bulgars returned to town; houses were repaired, streets and

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bazaars cleansed, shops and booths reopened; the people breathed more freely, and trade revived. Bullion came from Constantinople. There was a violent quarrel between Mehemed Isset and Haji Aziz, owing to the latter requiring the greater part of the sum sent in order to satisfy his numerous and loudly clamouring private creditors. When the report first spread that money was on the road the serai was besieged by tradespeople and usurers; but Mehemed Isset, supported by the officers of the garrison, the influential citizens, and public opinion generally, carried the day. Dealers resumed mutual trust, debts were paid, money circulated freely. Mehemed Isset, leaving Haji Aziz to the undisturbed enjoyment of his once more filled flesh-pots, gained the respect and the confidence of all creeds and races by a firm and uncorrupted ministration of justice. The weather was beautifully fine (until September, when rain set in), the crops promised an abundant harvest, all necessaries were plentiful, and prices fell almost to their normal level.

Gourko, after his premature and ill-judged invasion of East Roumelia in July, had been called back across the Balkans; on the River Lom[37] in the east, and before the Shipka Pass in the south, things were at a standstill, and in Asia the first cheap successes of Russia had been followed by serious reverses and retreat.

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It was on the 1st August, two days after the second Plevna battle, and a day after the notorious panic among the Russian troops at Sistova, that the Grand Duke Nicholas sent by wire his despairing cry for help to the Prince at Bukarest. On the 7th August a Roumanian division crossed by boats to Nikopoli; but only on the 27th commenced the passage of the two others by the Corabia bridge, and on the 2nd September the bulk of the auxiliary army was on the opposite bank. That means, a full month elapsed between the Grand Duke's entreaty and its compliance. The reason was the want of road communication between Little Wallachia—whither the Roumanian forces had been drawn by the irresistible magnet of Widdin and its occupants—and the central south of the Principality, which fact I have already commented upon when introducing the reader to the neighbour across the road.

The new offensive alliance between Russia and Roumania was to the advantage of Widdin, since it made away with the possibility of an attack from Calafat. Then came the glorious September action around Plevna, and every loyal heart beat high. There were thanksgiving services in the mosques and in the synagogue, festivals in the serai and in private houses: Widdin was proud of its Osman, on whom it looked as a townsman.

On the 25th September some passing uneasiness

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was caused by Krylow's cavalry having cut the Plevna wire between Rahova and Plevna.[88] Communication with Sofia remained intact.

By this time life in the pashalik had resumed its normal course, and people were only too glad to forget—since the fact was not brought home to them by direct evidence—that the dogs of war had been let loose over two continents, that oceans of blood had flown on vast battlefields, that history was being moulded in huge furnaces redundant with thunder and fire, that new kingdoms were made in a day, and that a venerable throne was tottering. Meanwhile autumn had set in, to the usual accompaniment of rain and storm; and after October snow and frost held undisputed sway.

The third Plevna battle was succeeded by another spell of calm. Operations were held in abeyance everywhere: Turkey was on the defensive, Russia waited for Plevna to fall. Then came the investment of Osman's army. Still the populace of Widdin was of good cheer; for Rahova and Lom Palankah stood betwixt them and disaster, Calafat was deserted by all but a few battalions and the gunners necessary to man the batteries, and perfect confidence was reposed in the well-trained and thoroughly equipped Widdin division, in the ordnance and its numerous crew, and in Mehemed Isset, the capable and energetic commandant.

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This officer had repeatedly (between August and December) proffered to the wirepullers to bring his fine division to the aid of Osman, his chief, and trust Widdin to the fort-gunners, the four frontier battalions, the many companies of engineers, workmen, and gendarmes, the irregular cavalry, and the numerous volunteers who had meanwhile been organised, and to some extent drilled—a total of close on 6000 men; but so much importance was attached at headquarters to the place—and perhaps not wrongly, since Roumania had still a division unengaged, not to mention her fresh levies, and Servia was known to be making strenuous preparations for a fresh campaign—that his proposition was peremptorily vetoed.

The populace of Widdin had settled down to the winter routine of business and pleasure, in happy disregard of war and invader, when a cloud appeared on the horizon in the shape of the Roumanian advance on Rahova, which soon assumed a serious aspect, threatening disaster and collapse.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE CLOUD ON THE HORIZON

Dealing with the third period of the Russo-Turkish War—ending in the fall of Plevna—so far as it concerns the towns of Rahova, Lom Palankah, and Widdin.

November and December 1877.

"Months ran on and rumour of battle grew."
TENNYSON.

FROM the great Russo-Roumanian army which invested Plevna there was detached, on November 20th, a flying division consisting of 8 battalions of Roumanian infantry, 3 regiments of Roumanian and 4 of Russian cavalry, and 30 guns (a total of 8000 men), which, commanded by the Roumanian Colonel Slanitcheano, arrived before Rahova on the 21st November. This town was now held by five weak battalions (not more than 2000 men), with no cavalry or field artillery, and with only twenty obsolete fort-guns; three redoubts defended the land side, and a roughly-built terrace the river-bank. The garrison made a brave but futile stand, and effected a skilful escape to Lom Palankah,

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whither the hostile division followed at a safe distance.[89]

Mehemed Isset caused this town, as well as Artzar, to be abandoned, deciding, with undoubted strategical wisdom, to make his stand in Widdin, where he concentrated all the troops available. On the 30th November the Roumanian detachment reached Lom Palankah, found it deserted, and occupied it. Here it was joined, on the 20th December, by part of the Roumanian force available after the fall of Plevna, and on the same day this corps started for Widdin.

Meanwhile all Europe had been thrilled by the wondrous story of Osman's last sortie, on 10th December, and of the surrender *à merci* of the Plevna army. It was the death-blow to Turkey. Russia, Roumania, and Montenegro breathed freely once more and prepared for energetic action, Greece rattled her sword, and Servia pounced upon the prey which the valour, the endurance, the terrific sacrifices of others had brought down. On the 14th December Prince Milan crossed the frontier, making for Ak Palankah, and meeting, much to his surprise as well as to that of Europe, tenacious resistance at every step from the weak Turkish garrisons.

The Roumanians had blazed forth the tale of the "storming" of Rahova with so many flourishes of inflated rhetoric and ingenious invention that the

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populace of Widdin became frightened at the wonderful prowess of the force approaching on the Lom Palankah road. Or, to resume our metaphor, the cloud on the horizon grew from a tiny speck to a vast edifice that obscured the entire heavens, as clouds have an uncomfortable habit of doing. Then the Turkish evacuation and the Roumanian seizure of Lom Palankah added their quota of terror, and it required all the firmness of Mehemed Isset to allay a panic. Sooth to say, numbers of Bulgars left the villages to take shelter within the strong walls of the Virgin Fortress, which had withstood the storms of centuries; and it is certainly a strange freak of history, that during the siege Widdin contained nearly as many Christian inhabitants as it had held at the outbreak of hostilities, although with the first shot of the Calafat batteries three-fourths of their number had fled in terror.

It is worthy of notice that the Servians made no attempt upon Widdin, though it lay within their sphere of action, and outside the proper pale of the Roumanian army, but confined themselves to the weaker places, Ak Palankah (taken 24th December), Pirot (28th December), and Nish (10th January). One is tempted to quote the English captain's reply to the Frenchman who had surrendered his ship without firing a shot: "I cannot give you a certificate that you have acted with valour, but

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I can testify that you behaved with great prudence."[40]

What could be done by the commandant to prepare the city for a siege was done to the limits of the possible. Huge stores were collected, the adjoining villages being ransacked; the biscuit-factory and the local workshops were busy night and day; the defences were strengthened and augmented, and every hillock, every building within the outer *enceinte*, and some of the villages, hamlets, and farms beyond it were transformed into strongholds. On the 18th December Mehemed Isset proclaimed the town to be in a state of siege; the civil tribunals were abolished, and henceforth courts-martial carried on the machinery of the law with efficiency, firmness, and despatch. The *extra muros* camps had been broken up when the inclement weather had set in. All the troops were now harboured within the *enceinte*, except such as garrisoned those of the outlying townlets and villages that were to be defended, namely, Novoselo, Smerdan, Inova, and Flortin against the Roumanians, Rakovitza and Bregovo against the Servians.

The winter was exceptionally severe. There was nearly always snow on the ground, and the north wind blew keenly and icily.

Mehemed Isset had 12,000 trained troops in town, with 500 fort-guns, and 2000 irregulars and

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armed citizens, against which force the Roumanians pitted three divisions (42 battalions, 60 squadrons, and 150 guns), a total of 32,000 men, commanded by the chief of their army, General Tchernat. In Calafat were, besides, three regiments of militia (6000 men) and 43 guns.

Widdin was as much prepared for a desperate and prolonged resistance as any town in Turkey can reasonably expect to be, when on 20th December, during a snowstorm, the Roumanian vanguard appeared at Vidbol. On the same day the Sofia wire was cut by the hostile scouts. For the last time in the annals of history the ancient Danube stronghold was destined to be the bulwark of the Crescent; but the irony of fate decreed that, although the siege failed completely, yet was the city to be handed over to the beleaguerers, never to be recovered by its rightful owners, and to come ultimately into the possession of those who had not struck one blow, for or against it.

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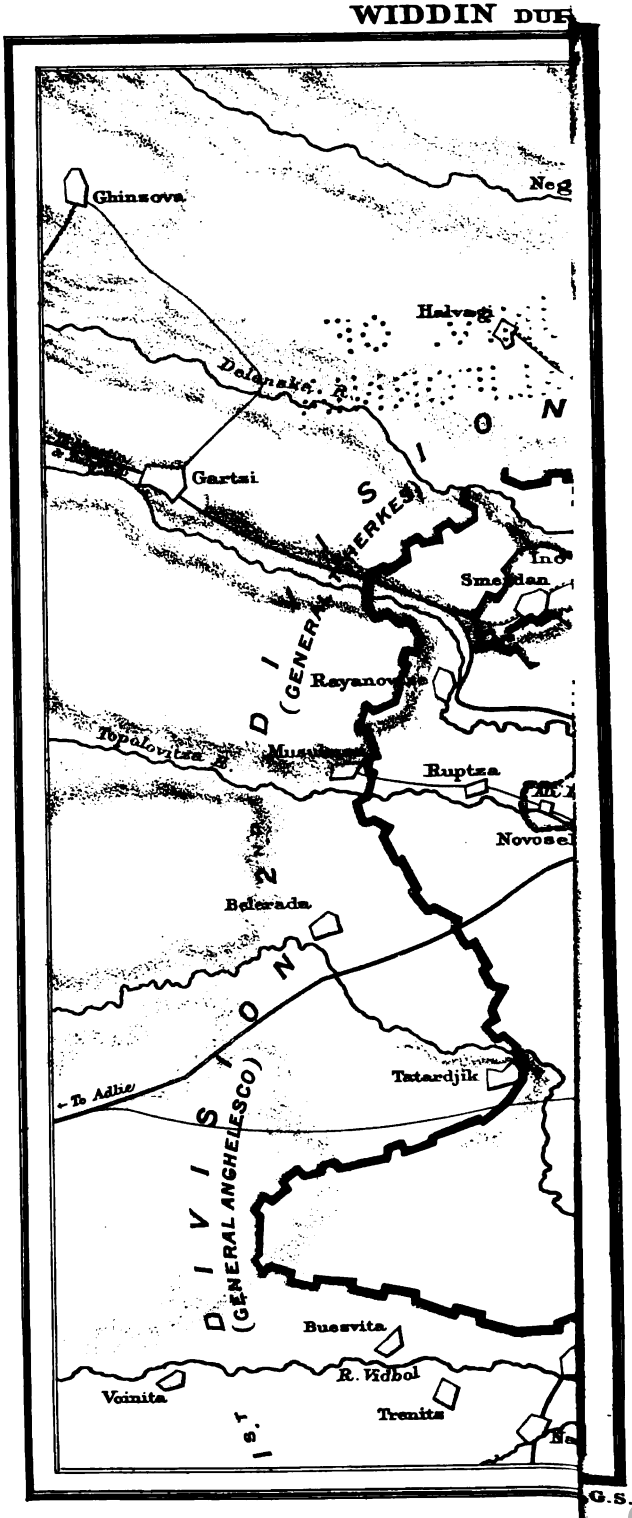
WIDDIN DUE
Ghinsova
Halvag
Dalgraka R.
Gartsi
DIVISION
(GENERAL SERKES)
Rayanovtsi
Topalovitza R.
Ruptza
Novosel
Belgrada
DIVISION
(GENERAL ANGHELESCO)
To Adlie
Tatardjik
Buesvita
R. Vidbol
Voinita
Tremitta
G.S.

CHAPTER XX

THE SIEGE

Dealing with the fourth and last period of the Russo-Turkish War, ending in the armistice, notably with the siege of Widdin.

December 1877 and January 1878.

"I see a dark-eyed girl of Paradise,
She waves a handkerchief of green, and cries,
'Come thou to me and kiss me, for I love thee.'"

OLD TURKISH BATTLE SONG.

LATE in the evening of the 20th December the vanguard of the Roumanian army, a division commanded by the General Anghelesco, occupied Vidbol. On the following dawn it started in a north-westerly direction for the purpose of crossing the nameless little river which flows into the Danube midway between Vidbol and Widdin. Why the division, or any portion of it, did not attempt to proceed towards Widdin by the good Artzar road along the Danube, is an occurrence for which I can find no manner of explanation.

After a toilsome march of two miles through the snow the detachment divided itself into two columns,

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of which the eastern was to cross the stream mentioned at the village Tatardjik, the western at the village Belerada near the Adlié road.

During the night the Turkish commander, having been apprised of the enemy's approach, had caused these villages to be occupied and roughly entrenched. There were in each a weak battalion of 400 men, a posse of mounted irregulars, and a couple of guns. An hour after noon the combat commenced simultaneously in both places (which were about two miles and a half apart), and towards dusk, after sharp fighting, the Turks, yielding to an overwhelming superiority of numbers, abandoned their positions, making in good order for Novoselo. The Roumanians did not pursue, but stayed for the night in and near Belerada. This was the first engagement which the Widdin division had to sustain during the war. The loss in killed and wounded was about 200 men to either party.

On the news of this double action reaching Widdin, Mehemed Isset despatched to Novoselo, a large village on the Adlié road, three battalions and six guns taken from among the lighter pieces of the outer *enceinte*. The Novoselo force, including the battalion previously in possession, and the two retiring thither from Tatardjik and Belerada, mustered now a total of 3000 men and 10 guns.

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In an incredibly short time the village, the road, and the brook (Topolovitza) in rear, were strongly fortified, and the Roumanians did certainly a wise thing in not attempting to carry the place by storm, for the position was well within the range of the guns of the outer *enceinte*. Anghelesco bivouacked at a respectful distance, and caused his batteries to be entrenched in the shape of a quarter circle facing north-east.

In the meantime a second Roumanian division, commanded by General Tcherkes,[41] had marched from Plevna by way of Mahulleta and Altimir to Biélogradchik,[42] and had left a brigade at the latter place so as to forestall and prevent any Turkish attempt at relief from the south. The other brigade, with the divisional cavalry and artillery, proceeded towards Widdin by the Adlié road. Arriving within the fighting line on the 22nd December, a day after Anghelesco had seized upon his position facing Novoselo, the division occupied the hamlet Musulman on Anghelesco's left, and extended its northern wing almost as far as Smerdan and Inova, which two villages, strongly fortified, remained in the hands of the Turks. The latter had wisely abandoned their feeble and almost isolated outposts at Bregovo, Rakovitza, and Flortin.

The third Roumanian division,[43] commanded by Colonel Leka, arrived on the scene of action

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on the 28th December, and immediately completed the semicircle of investment by occupying the space between Tcherkes' left and the Danube, notably the villages Halvagi and Negonanita, with Flortin in the rear as a strong support, and in case of a reverse, as a place of retreat across the Danube.

The Artzar road had meanwhile been well fortified by Mehemed Isset on a spot about three miles south of the outer *enceinte*, where it crosses the nameless streamlet mentioned before by means of a stone bridge, called the Chuban bridge; but, strange to say, the Roumanians made no attempt upon this point.

The circle of investment was complete by the 29th December. The reader may find a recapitulation of its components helpful:—

Right wing, from the Danube below Widdin (near Vidbol) to west of Novoselo: 1st division, General Anghelesco, about 10,000 men and 50 guns, directly opposed to which were the outpost on the Chuban bridge, held by 500 men and 2 guns, and that at Novoselo, held by 3000 men and 10 guns.

Centre, from west of Novoselo to north of Inova: 2nd division, General Tcherkes, about 6000 men and 40 guns, directly opposed to which was the Turkish outpost at Smerdan and Inova, held by 1800 men and 6 guns.

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Left wing, from north of Inova to the Danube above Widdin (near Koshava): 3rd division, Colonel Leka, about 10,000 men and 50 guns.

On the left Danube bank: the Calafat position, stretching along the river from Calafat in the north to Chiupercheni in the south, about 6000 men and 43 guns.

In addition to these forces the Roumanians had a reserve of 2000 men at Flortin and an outpost of 4000 men at Biélogradchik, whilst three battalions of fresh levies (3000 men), with some pieces of heavy siege artillery, were on the road to Calafat from Crayova. Beyond the Flortin detachment there was no general reserve; each division had its own reserves and supports. The headquarters were at Adlié.

The last days of the year 1877 passed quietly. There was no shelling on the land side, and but little desultory fighting between the outposts. The Calafat batteries fired a few shots. The weather was extremely severe, and the landscape continued to wear its robe of white, which the heavens renewed almost daily. The marshes were frozen, thus facilitating operations to the assailants and completely annulling the town's strongest defence.

On the 1st January 1878 General Tchernat, the Roumanian commander-in-chief, summoned Mehemed Isset to surrender, who declined per-

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emptorily. With the following morning commenced a violent cannonade throughout the circle of investment, to which the Turks responded vigorously on every point. The artillery of the latter had the advantage of numbers (500 pieces to 200) and their guns were of heavier calibre, and therefore more suited to a stationary duel; but in other respects the Roumanians had the upper hand. They were on higher ground, their ordnance (Krupp) was of the most modern type and the best make, they had the advantage of extended lines and greater mobility. The shelling, though of a less vehement character after the first combat, lasted for some days. In Widdin three or four minarets were shot down, an important bazaar was wrecked, several fires broke out, and a good many peaceful inhabitants received hurt or death. The troops in the bastions, redoubts, and batteries suffered little, except as to Yeni Tabiya, where an explosion of ammunition dealt out extensive destruction, and as to Novoselo, Smerdan, and Inova, where, the range being shorter, the damage and the losses were severe. In Calafat there was a big flare, and one battery just south of it was entirely demolished. The Roumanian troops in front of the three villages named suffered grievously, elsewhere but little. I have no reliable figures to work upon, and estimates in such circumstances

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are impracticable and misleading; but I aver that, as to the number of men slain or wounded, the Roumanians were the greater losers, whereas to damage done to earthworks and positions their opponents fared the worse.

The Turkish troops were obedient, of good cheer, and hopeful. They had their splendid great-coats and a plethora of blankets against the cold, and the supply of food, comforts, raiment, and all necessaries, was abundant and regular. The town had made ample provision for three to four months, with one vital exception: fuel. In coal and fire-wood strict economy was enjoined. Hope and courage, having been almost abandoned after the disaster of Plevna, revived wonderfully, but then the inmates of the beleaguered city did not know of the twofold Russian Balkan crossing, and of the advance upon Sofia. The Empire is not by any means laid low yet, was the general voice, and among the very best stands made will be, Inshallah! that of Widdin.

That under the impression of a bombardment dismay and alarm reigned among the peaceful inhabitants is small wonder. But the commander's administration was firm and impartial, conceding no favour to rank, race, or religion. Industry and commerce had entirely ceased with the completion of the investment. Many a hand,

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accustomed only to the file of the craftsman or the reed-pen of the trader, grasped now a rifle, its owner having joined the Moslem citizen-guard, which did double duty as police and as gate-watchers. A non-sectarian civil fire-brigade was formed, and gangs of non-militant volunteer labourers of both creeds were employed in erecting fresh earthworks, in repairing and strengthening the existing, or in patching the houses and buildings which had been damaged by shells.

Thanks to Turkey's chronic impecuniosity, money had entirely ceased to circulate. Hard cash appeared on the surface to be absent. Why cannot, in such exceptional circumstances, humanity lay aside, for once in a while, the awful worship of money, the vice of hoarding which has made this race and this globe what they are, which has prostituted human life down to the level that we behold at every hour of our lives, with every step we take abroad?

The principal holders of provisions and necessaries were the Jews. They asked such exorbitant prices that, even when they accepted promissory notes in lieu of the almost absent coin, barter became well-nigh impracticable, and declined, finally, altogether. As they were also the only recognised bankers, money-changers, pawnbrokers, and usurers, it is no wonder that they alone in the entire com-

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munity were of high glee. But their joy was short-lived. The commandant decreed a compulsory sale to Government of all victuals and essentials at normal prices, and henceforth the inhabitants were rationed, like the troops, at per head.

About the 10th January the bombardment ceased, and after a few days' quiet there was one morning an exceptionally heavy cannonade of some hours' duration. Frightened by the shells falling in the streets and demolishing houses, the Bulgars and Jews sent a combined deputation to the commandant, imploring him, with every expression of loyalty and good-will, to cease the futile combat, to bow to the inevitable, and to surrender the town whilst yet honourable terms would be accepted by the besieger. In the meantime Mehemed Isset had received through a spy, who had penetrated the hostile lines at night, the news of the defeat and the retreat of the Turks on all points; and the uselessness of fresh bloodshed was brought home to him forcibly by the messenger's dry statement that the Ottoman Empire had collapsed. But his bravery revolted against seizing the initiative in making overtures to the foe. Whilst the council called by him was yet uneasily meditating, there came the news of the arrival of a Roumanian flag of truce. Thus the disagreeable task of taking the first step was spared

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the spirited and as yet undaunted defenders, for the *parlementaire* was the bearer of another and more urgent challenge to lay down arms, embodied in a letter of courteous though firm tenor, containing also the detailed news of the Turkish defeat by the Servians at Ak Palankah (December 24th) and Pirot (December 28th), and of the surrender of Nish (January 10th); of the Montenegrin success at Antivari (January 10th) and the siege of Skutari; of the bloody catastrophe at Shainovo (January 9th), involving the total destruction of the Turkish Shipka army, late Suleiman Pasha's, the best of the Empire; of Baker Pasha's, the reputed Englishman's, futile stand at Tashkessen (December 31st) and the Turkish abandonment of Sofia (January 4th); and, lastly, of the unopposed advance of the united Russian Shipka and Sofia armies upon Philippopolis. These tidings of woe were accompanied by newspapers as corroborative evidence.

Mehemed Isset, after a brief consultation, sent an acknowledgment, and declared his readiness to deliver Widdin into the hands of the Roumanians, if the garrison were allowed free exit, with arms, baggage, and full honours of war, and a safe-conduct until they should reach the nearest point of undisputed Ottoman territory. He explained in his letter that Widdin was amply provisioned for several months; that the troops were disciplined, spirited,

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and cheerful; that they were ready to die rather than go into captivity; and that, finally, the Widdin garrison had not done one tithe yet of what honour compelled it, and military efficiency fully enabled it, to do in defence of flag and liberty. In conclusion, the writer reminded his opponent that the Widdin troops had formed part of Osman Pasha's army, were veterans of the Servian War, were of the same stock as that which had so long and successfully held Plevna against the terrific onslaughts of an overwhelming majority; and wound up by saying that he, the writer, was, personally, anxious to try conclusions in the open, so as to convince the Roumanian once more what stuff the Turk was made of. The reply arrived on the following morning. It was to the effect that the Roumanian general could only agree to a capitulation of both town and garrison, the latter having to submit to captivity, though kindly treatment and every consideration were faithfully promised, and special indulgences to officers. Mehemed Isset had in the meanwhile repented of his ill-timed counter-offer. His answer was brief and to the point: "I wholly reject your proposals. By to-morrow's dawn my batteries will reopen fire."

No further negotiations took place. Shortly after sunrise on the following morning (about the 15th January), during a blinding snowstorm, the

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entire artillery of both belligerents commenced a vigorous shelling, which lasted, with intensity and without interruption, for two hours. Then it ceased suddenly along the whole Roumanian line, and Mehemed Isset, who had been apprised of the Russo-Roumanian tactics at Plevna,[44] made all preparations to meet a general attack. Towards noon dense masses of Roumanian infantry were noticed moving from the neighbourhood of Tatardjik south-eastward, across the frozen marshes towards the Artzar road, and the Turkish commander organised in town forthwith an auxiliary brigade of five battalions, with four guns, a half-squadron of regular cavalry, and a large detachment of mounted irregulars, to assist the troops (one battalion and two guns) which held the road at the little bridge (Chuban) mentioned before. This force assembled in Emir Tabiya, the southernmost redoubt of the outer *enceinte*, and when it became clear that the enemy was making straight for the bridge, it left by the Artzar gate, and marched hurriedly along the road southward. But no engagement took place. For some unexplained reason the Roumanians did not attack. The contending forces remained opposite to each other for nearly twenty-four hours, and then the bulk of the Roumanian detachment moved off, westward, retracing the way it had come.

The temptation to undertake something against

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an enemy now inferior in numbers, to utilise the obvious blunder of the hostile leaders, proved too much for the Turkish commander of this point. With his six battalions he made a dashing assault upon the Roumanian battery nearest to the Danube, which succeeded completely, and delivered into his hands one gun, a hundred prisoners, and two redoubts. But, of course, the success was purely local, and therefore short-lived. Strong Roumanian reinforcements arrived, before whom the Turks had to yield, taking spoil, captives, and wounded with them, and in the end things remained simply as they had been before the commencement of the action. The Turks sacrificed in this encounter about a hundred men in killed and wounded; the Roumanians must have lost at least double that number, besides prisoners.

The Turkish auxiliary brigade returned to its quarters in the inner *enceinte*, and affairs at the bridge remained *in statu quo ante*.

Between the 16th and 24th January there was almost daily shelling of a lax and desultory character. The Turkish troops suffered severely from the snow and the intense cold; hundreds of frost-bitten men had to seek the town hospitals, and several deaths due to exposure occurred. Owing to the scarcity of fuel no fires could be lighted, except those necessary for cooking, though

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some compensation was afforded by the abundance of warm clothing and good food, by rations, excellent both as to quantity and as to quality. It became necessary to deal out hot drinks at regular intervals, and a mixture of treacle, water, and brandy, or treacle and beer, heated to boiling-point, was found efficacious and palatable.[45]

In hospitals and ambulances affairs were—so far as I can ascertain—infinitely better than they had been with us in Plevna. Drugs, surgical implements, comforts, strengthening food and delicacies were plentiful, and there was ample and competent attendance, a German doctor (Schmidt) being among the most trusted and skilful medical men.

The condition of the inhabitants grew from bad to worse, mainly owing to the abject fear and alarm of the women. Many families, of all three creeds and races, left their houses and took shelter in the cheerless but bomb-proof cellars of the citadel. Some hundreds of hovels and booths collapsed merely through the vibration of the ground, when the heavy guns of the river-side batteries exchanged fiery greetings with the opposite bank. The streets, courts, and bazaars were deserted, and the town resembled a city of the dead. But not a tithe of such unutterable misery as I have witnessed in Plevna during the last

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weeks of the investment reigned in the beleaguered Danube fortress, and, on the whole, the inhabitants were more frightened than hurt. The scarcity of fuel and the severe cold caused much discomfort and discontent, much severe illness and distress; but otherwise no want was seriously felt. Civil administration, the dispensing of justice, and the carrying out of its decrees, were not permitted to suffer for one single instant, thanks to the energetic commander and his able adjutants. The rivalry of opposing sect, race, and faction was allowed to go to sleep: all were at peace, in view of the one common consideration—safety of life, home, and property.

On the 25th January the most serious engagement of the siege took place—a Roumanian attack on a large scale upon Smerdan and Inova. These two villages, which are about 1200 yards apart, had been made into one stronghold by three redoubts, interconnected by trenches and covered ways. The front of the position faced north-west; within it were the villages, which, deserted by their inhabitants, offered the soldiers ample housing accommodation, stabling, and store-room; the rear was in easy and uninterrupted communication with Widdin by means of three tolerably good roads: those of Flortin, Smerdan, and Bregovo. The position was manned by three battalions, a battery

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of six pieces, a company of engineers, and a detachment of mounted irregulars, a total of 1800 men.

In the afternoon of the 24th there had been a heavy fall of snow, followed by a short spell of thaw. In the night frost had set in again, and, as a consequence, on the morning of the 25th the roads, fields, and marshes were like glass. Moreover, a thick fog hung over the landscape, and, altogether, a worse day for fighting could not have been chosen.

At early dawn General Tcherkes, who commanded on this spot, brought four batteries within close range, which opened a murderous fire upon the villages and the redoubts. But the Turks responded so well with their six pieces, and were so ably supported by the heavy guns of the nearest points in the outer *enceinte*, that one by one the Roumanian batteries were silenced and had to retreat. At nine in the forenoon Tcherkes, despairing to make any impression with fresh artillery—he could have brought three more batteries into action—ordered a charge upon the Turkish position, which was undertaken by his entire brigade of nine battalions, two upon each redoubt, and three in second line, whilst a large body of cavalry, twenty squadrons, was kept ready on the Flortin road to pursue the enemy in case of success. Thus the Roumanian general brought about 8000 men into the field.

The treble charge, delivered simultaneously, with

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great dash and precision, succeeded in the central redoubt at the first onslaught, while the end redoubts resisted. But these being now separated from each other, the villages in flames, and many hundreds of men dead and disabled in the lost post, the Turkish commander thought it expedient to save the remainder of his force by retreat upon Widdin along the Smerdan and Flortin roads. This was done, and in the rush of a pursuing body of Roumanian horsemen and foot-soldiers in a disorderly mass, two guns, though bravely defended, were lost. Two had already been ceded to the enemy in the central redoubt, so that only two pieces out of six were saved. But the pursuit was checked, and the retreat continued unmolested. Presently the whole immense body of Roumanian cavalry trotted forward; but in the meantime Mehemed Isset had despatched reinforcements (a brigade), and at the sight of fresh troops, showing fight, the horsemen wheeled round and trotted back. The action was over just after noon. The losses show that it had been a well-contested fray; the Roumanian casualties amounted to 750 killed and wounded, whilst the Turks sacrificed nearly one-half of their fighting force—350 killed and 500 wounded, most of the latter falling into the hands of the enemy. Thus, out of an engaged force of less than 10,000 men 1600 were dead or disabled.

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The Roumanians occupied the conquered position, and fortified it at what had been the rear, and was now the front; but, owing to the proximity of the outer *enceinte*, they could turn their gain to no good account. Indeed, on that very afternoon a battery, hastily installed, was silenced and well-nigh demolished by the Turkish shells.

The 26th and 27th January were days of calm on both sides, mainly owing to thick fog and heavy falls of snow.

On the 28th a regiment of the division Leka occupied the village Kapitanovtzé, which had hitherto been in the neutral zone between the two lines, a kind of no man's land, and then marched quickly eastward, advancing upon the fishing hamlet Katova, on the Danube, where there was a Turkish outpost of a few companies. These, on the alert, surprised and captured, after a short, sharp encounter, the small Roumanian vanguard, about 100 men, who, in blissful ignorance of the fact that the place was occupied, had fallen into a trap. On the approach of the bulk of the hostile force the Turks withdrew with their prisoners to Yeni Tabiya, while Katova and Shekselo were occupied by the Roumanians.

By this time the course of events had made it manifest to the Turkish leaders that the plan of action of the Roumanians was to forbear one thing and to do another: evidently they did not intend

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to make a general assault upon the Widdin position, such as that upon Plevna on the 11th September (which, indeed, would have been madness, considering its strength), and, as apparently, they contemplated to tighten the belt of investment by degrees, here a little and there a little, for the obvious purpose of bringing their guns within more effective range. The abortive attempt upon the Chuban bridge on the 15th, the storming of the Smerdan position on the 25th, and the occupation of Kapitanovtzé and Katova on the 28th, had demonstrated this beyond a doubt. To prevent a further carrying out of this cautious plan—slow but sure—the Turkish commandant resolved greatly to strengthen the three outer positions still remaining to the Turks, that is, the Artzar road bridge down-river, Novoselo and its entrenchments in the west, and Yeni Tabiya up-stream. The first was increased by two companies and as many guns. A battalion and two guns were added to the second, so that there were now 3500 men and 12 guns on the spot, and in its right flank the windmill of Ali Bey was fortified and manned by one battalion and two guns. Yeni Tabiya (which contained originally 12 heavy guns and one battalion) was strengthened by the addition of another battalion and six guns of lighter calibre.

These measures were carried out on the 29th

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January, during fog and snow, which concealed the movements from the enemy.

On the 30th January the shelling was renewed, having been almost suspended since the 25th. The Turks replied vigorously, convincing their opponents that they would gain nothing by a continued cannonade. This day—for a wonder fine and dry, with bright sunshine and cloudless sky—marked the last serious shelling during the siege, for henceforward and until the truce there was silence on both sides, excepting the occasional exchange of a few projectiles, more by way of sport, or perhaps in exuberance of spirits, between individual batteries in juxtaposition, than by design.

Simultaneously with the knowledge that the Roumanians did not intend to make a general attack, the conviction had grown upon the Turkish commander that his best plan was to harass the foe, and weaken his power by continuous local petty charges, since with the entire country in the hands of the enemy a sortie on a large scale was out of the question.

On the last day of the month—which was bright and clear, conveying a promise of spring—the first was undertaken of what was intended to be a series of petty sallies. During the night a force of three battalions had assembled in Emir Tabiya; at early dawn it marched to the Chuban bridge, and,

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together with the battalion in possession, undertook at once a vigorous attack upon the redoubts which had been the centre of strife on the 15th January. The Roumanians (two battalions and two batteries) were taken completely by surprise. A hundred of them were killed; 200, mostly wounded, fell into the hands of the Turks. The latter blew up the magazine and demolished the guns. As a matter of course, strong Roumanian reinforcements arrived, and, equally of course, the Turks yielded and retired to the bridge post, taking prisoners and considerable spoil in arms, clothing, and victuals with them. Among the trophies were, to the delight of the whole community, a number of carts laden with some thousands of fagots of firewood. As before, things remained *in statu quo*. The fighting, which was over at noon, had cost the Turks about 50 men, the Roumanians about 350, in killed and wounded.

Almost at the same hour a *parlementaire* arrived at the gate on the Bregovo road, and presented a letter from General Tchernat, containing a third and imperative challenge to lay down arms.

The Roumanian commander, apprised of the negotiations at headquarters for an armistice, although, of course, ignorant that it had been concluded and signed in Adrianople on that very day, was naturally anxious that before the cessation of hostilities

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his army should have the satisfaction and gain the world-wide repute of having captured impregnable Widdin, the consummation of which desire would have been the greatest triumph ever achieved, or likely to be achieved, by the troops of the Danube Principalities.

The letter contained the news of the occupation by the Russians of Philippopolis (January 14th) and Adrianople (January 20th), the former the capital of East Roumelia, the latter the second largest city of the Empire; of the Montenegrin success at Dulcigno (January 19th); of the Greek invasion in the south; and of the indisputable fact that the roads to Constantinople were open. "Eastern Bulgaria is bared of Turkish troops, excepting the weak and now isolated garrisons of the quadrilateral, and nothing remains to the Ottoman Empire in Europe but the defenceless capital and the surrounding districts." As before, the statements were borne out by the evidence of British, French, and Austrian journals. Of the impending armistice and of England's threatening attitude no mention was made.

Flushed with the day's victory, Mehemed Isset declined haughtily. The town is perfectly able to hold its own for four months to come, he said; and we have every reason to believe that this was no exaggeration.

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The 1st February was a day of calm on earth and bright sunshine above. On the 2nd there was some desultory shelling and outpost fighting, both insignificant and resultless.

Human beings will accustom themselves to any condition of life, and, sooth to say, the inhabitants of Widdin grew used to being besieged, and ended by rather liking it, since the rationing did away with the necessity of working for a living. Many families quitted the cold, damp vaults, and returned to their comfortable homes, preferring the remote risk of a shell to certain death from influenza, rheumatism, and other ailments of the human carcase too numerous to mention. Streets were cleaned, houses repaired, stalls and booths restocked, workshops reopened, and some little business was done. Hope revived, and even social gaieties brightened, here and there, the gloom of war reigning within and without the city gates. Such was the condition of things when, at noon on the 3rd February, just after Mehemed Isset had given orders for an attack on a large scale upon the Roumanian position at Inova — the possession of which was a tactical desideratum—swift and joyous messengers brought the news that a white flag had been hoisted on the roof of Smerdan's tallest house. Siege and war, both were over.

The struggle of Widdin had lasted forty-five, the

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siege proper thirty-six days. The defenders had lost 3000 men, the assailants 4000, in killed and wounded. In addition, the former had 1000, the latter double that number, of men incapacitated by illness or exposure; and each party had 500 prisoners. About 1000 peaceful inhabitants were dead, disabled, or invalided. Considering the brief duration of the siege, and the fact that the aggregate of fighters did not exceed 45,000, the total of casualties (12,000) demonstrates that neither side had spared itself, that, in fact, it had been from first to last a well-fought fray.

One indisputable fact in connection with the siege deserves mention: the beleaguering, or even the passive investment, of Widdin was, from the Russo-Roumanian point of view, superfluous, wholly useless whatever its result. Towards the end of December the general position of the war had totally isolated the town, and no further isolation by force of arms was needed. A single division, ay, a brigade, would have been sufficient to neutralise the garrison. Therefore we may take it for granted that the siege was undertaken for political reasons. These may have been of a twofold and reciprocal kind: on the one hand, Roumania, disgusted with the Russian alliance, may, after the fall of Plevna, have desired to operate singly and apart; on the other hand, Russia may have had a natural ambition

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to capture Constantinople without the somewhat inglorious aid of a third-rate Principality. But these are conjectures, since the motives that sway the *haute politique* are never made known. The facts which come to public knowledge are merely as sand thrust into the eyes of inquisitive persons in order to blind them to the real issues.

Widdin is one of the exceptions which prove the rule, that no stronghold can withstand a modern siege. These exceptions are to be found only in minor occurrences (the war of 1870 and 1871 exhibits half-a-dozen instances); it is the great events of military history (Sebastopol, Düppel, Metz, Strassburg, Paris, Kars) which have established that maxim. It would appear, from the results on record, that whilst it is true enough that every fortress must succumb to a regular siege, undertaken with the aid of all modern devices, and with a lavish expenditure of men, guns, time, trouble, and money, yet even a third-rate fastness may successfully resist, granted that only one of the factors which make up a good beleaguering force — commandership, spirit of the troops, number and quality of infantry, guns, and engineers, general position of the campaign—is deficient. In the case of Widdin the Roumanians failed because of the total inadequacy—both as to quantity and as to calibre—of their ordnance. It may be argued that the beleaguerers had not a fair chance, that the

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siege was cut short prematurely by the armistice. I can confute this argument only by my firm conviction —based upon that which I have learned from men within the town, upon my knowledge of the Turkish troops, and upon a close study, not only of the siege and its concomitant occurrences, but also of contemporary events in their entirety—that the town would have held out for three months longer, with reduced rations from four to five months, and would finally have succumbed only to starvation. But the purpose of a siege is not to bring about the fall of a place by the slow process of exhausting its resources. Modern campaigns, in their swiftness, demand that a siege should effect the capture of its objective by force of arms, be it by the shock of storming infantry, or by the destructive power of heavy guns, or by both combined. The non-attainment of this purpose by these means, or its attainment by other means—starvation, illness, treaty, treachery—proves failure.

In estimating the conduct of the Ottoman troops at Widdin, it is essential to remember that the siege occurred after Turkey had received her fatal blow, in the fall of Plevna, and when she was racked by her death-throes. If ever there was a forlorn hope in history Widdin deserves that designation. And yet they held on with that dogged tenacity which was the admiration—to mention only one name among a hundred that could be given—of Moltke.

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"The Turks only commence to defend where others leave off." Any man not wholly blinded by bigotry or race hatred, not entirely the slave of that atrocious liar, the cheap press, must pay his tribute of appreciation to soldiers who have so nobly defended a hopeless cause.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE OLD WOMEN'S TEA-PARTY

Dealing with the armistice of Adrianople, the Treaty of San Stefano, and the Congress of Berlin, notably with the fate of Widdin.

February to July 1878.

"I regained my freedom with a sigh."
BYRON.

ON the last day of January the leaders of the belligerent parties in Adrianople concluded an armistice. The news of the cessation of hostilities did not reach the besiegers of Widdin until the 3rd February. General Tchernat sent a *parlementaire* to his enemy, and it was immediately arranged that all fighting and firing should cease forthwith; but for the nonce the troops of both parties remained in their positions, a line of demarcation being laid down. Mehemed Isset liberated the Roumanian prisoners, on receiving an undertaking from their chief that they should not again carry arms against the Porte. The Roumanians tendered food and necessaries; but as there was still an abundance of everything in the

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Widdin stores, the offer was courteously declined, except as to firewood, of which a goodly quantity was gratefully accepted. The relations between the contending parties became most friendly: the outposts talked to each other, exchanged commodities, and amused themselves with antics and frolicsome disport; the officers met at the boundary line, and dispensed a cordial hospitality.

By that time Roumania had had enough of the Russian alliance. The brutal behaviour of the Russian soldiery on Roumanian soil, and afterwards towards their comrades of the Principality in the bivouacs before Plevna; the insolent overbearing of the Muscovite officers; the contemptuous ignoring of the fine Roumanian force in the Russian reports and bulletins issued to the journalists for publication broadcast:[46] these and many other slights rankled in the minds of Wallachians and Moldavians alike, of soldiers, citizens, and peasants, of officers and men. Had not Roumania borne the brunt of the September holocaust? had not Roumanian troops stormed and conquered the much-contested Grivitza redoubt? and had not the Roumanian army formed almost one-half of the circle of investment, whereas, in proportion to numbers, it should have furnished a section not larger than a fourth or a fifth? The Muscovite recompense was such base ingratitude as no

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Roumanian will forget until the crack of doom. When the terms of the Peace of San Stefano became known, and Roumania discovered that Russia was to have a goodly and valuable slice of her territory (part of Bessarabia), in exchange for a sterile and worthless waste (the Dobrudcha), the indignation grew so poignant that but the smallest additional provocation would have been required to induce the young kingdom to draw her sword against her erstwhile ally. Nor was the Congress of Berlin more generous: it confirmed the terms of the treaty, and gave nor vote nor heed to the injured party. Russia has created in Roumania a formidable barrier against the future southward progress of her Czars. But this by the way.

On the 10th February Mehemed Isset received from Stamboul the ratification of the armistice, and the command to deliver the town to the Roumanian troops. It requires but little power of imagination to paint to one's self the poignant grief and sorrow of this brave officer, on being compelled to hand over to the foe the fine city he had so well and successfully defended. Report said that for some hours his rage was quite uncontrollable, and that his subordinates suffered severely: one had his ears boxed; another escaped a bastinado by the skin of his teeth. However,

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the old warrior cooled down, countermanded the order previously given to flog every Bulgarian petty offender, and gracefully marked the last day of the Turkish reign in Widdin by granting an amnesty to every prisoner in the jail and the citadel, debarring only two murderers, an incendiary, and a fellow convicted of an atrocious rape. He received a valedictory deputation of the Bulgars, whose respect and gratitude he had won for himself by moderation and impartiality during many trying months.

In all these negotiations Haji Aziz was simply ignored. The Turkish civil administration of the Virgin Fortress died with ignominy in this despicable person; the military command ended in a brave soldier and an honest man.

In the meantime the temperature had risen and the snow was fast disappearing. War and winter died together.

At dawn on the 12th February the Turkish force, comprising, after the losses incurred during the siege, 8000 men, assembled in the parade-ground between the two *enceintes*. A fine body it was of weather-beaten veterans, on whose features lay the pride of successful bravery and cheerful sacrifice, the haughty consciousness of having fulfilled a trying and difficult trust. With ragged raiment and battered arms, but with banners still floating, undismayed and uncon-

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quered, in the breeze, the hardy warriors returned home. The Roumanians had granted their opponents the fullest honours of war, and the division carried colours, arms, and baggage.

Mehemed Isset held review, and made, heart-broken, a brief speech. Then the Roumanian detachment destined to occupy the town (a brigade of infantry, a regiment of Rossiori, and one of mounted militia) arrived on the scene, led by General Tchernat in person, who was attended by his entire staff. The two commanders shook hands, wheeled their horses aside, and had a long and earnest conversation without listeners. The sun shone gaily on this brilliant scene; once more the Danube was blue and sparkling, and not a cloud obscured the vault of the heavens. On the hill-tops glistened the lingering snow, and a gentle breeze carried from the west a sweet presentiment of coming spring. At length there was peace on earth and good-will among men, and on the tower of the old Bulgar castle floated a huge flag of stainless white. How many treaties made and treaties broken had the grim old walls witnessed in a thousand years of storm and stress! And in the light of later events, the snowy banner on the citadel, the parades and reviews, the hand-shakes of former foes, the neat little speeches of compliment and vows of mutual forgiveness, ay, the very sunshine that flooded the wintry landscape

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with golden glory, appear like a hideous mockery; for but seven short years of armed peace, with difficulty maintained, elapsed before the Virgin Fortress was again dragged into the vortex of bloody strife, and had to withstand the stupendous shock of storming brigades.

The Roumanian troops were inspected by the Turkish pasha, the latter's force paraded proudly before the general, and then the Osmanlis marched off gaily, with banners flying and drums beating, through a lane of former enemies presenting arms. The Turkish reign in the Virgin Fortress was over, for ever and a day.

Mehemed Isset and his force stopped for a few days at Vidbol, and then proceeded in easy stages to Berkovitza, whence, a month or so later, they were directed *via* Sofia and Bellova, across the new boundary and the Rhodopé wilds into Macedonia.

The Bulgars of Widdin behaved very well to their Turkish fellow-citizens. The awful scenes enacted in Plevna, and in many other towns, where their evacuation by the Turkish soldiery placed the unhappy Moslems at the mercy of an infuriated rabble carrying, locked up in their breasts, the grudge of centuries of feud and oppression and race-hatred, found no answering echo in the streets of the old Danube stronghold. A provisional Government was immediately installed by the prominent

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Bulgarian traders, in which the Turks had a vote, and General Tchernat appointed a capable and honest officer of his force as civil head. The peace was not broken, the old law was respected until a new could be formulated, and the administration of justice was uncorrupted. As a result trade revived wonderfully, and after the lapse of a few months the town was once more prosperous and contented.

On the 3rd March the armistice was confirmed and ratified by the Treaty of San Stefano, which established the autonomy of Bulgaria, and granted to Roumania and Servia the royal crown. Widdin fell to the young Principality.

Towards the middle of March the Roumanian troops erected a pontoon bridge to Calafat, and evacuated the town, amid tokens of regret and gratitude from all classes and creeds among the inhabitants; for so well had they fulfilled their duties of police and gendarmerie in town and country, that life and property had been as safe, justice as impartial, commonwealth as well ordered, as in the best-governed British or German township.

On the same day two drushines of the newly-established Bulgarian militia took possession of the town, amidst scenes of excitement and enthusiasm. For the first time in five centuries Bulgaria had a soldiery, a uniform, a badge, a banner, an acknowledged name, and we may well forgive the Bulgars

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that on that day many a rowdy obtained a bloody head in the wine-shops, and many a sot rolled in the gutters. They had processions in the public places and carousals in the *cabarets*. But no grave offence was committed, no serious breach of the peace took place, and no Moslem received insult, harm, or molest,—to the honour of the Virgin Fortress be that expressly stated.

On this second change of ownership the Mussulmans of the town had looked with fear and distrust, and between the armistice and the peace some 200 Turkish families had left to cross the frontier into Ottoman territory, never to return, much to the detriment of trade and prosperity. As it so happened, their timidity was uncalled for and groundless.

In the Peace of San Stefano, Russia, no less than Bulgaria, had reckoned without the host, that is to say, without Europe. The fussy intervention of that ridiculous old fogey, European diplomacy, created the Congress of Berlin, which an irate German writer of the period called "the old women's tea-party."[47]

The meeting of the fathers in solemn conclave undid the judicious and sensible alliance of Bulgaria and East Roumelia, which the Treaty of San Stefano had initiated, and decreed, furthermore, that all the Danube fastnesses, Widdin first and foremost, be

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immediately demolished. Thus, it looked to the near-sighted observer as if the martial history of the Virgin Fortress were closed for aye, as if Widdin would henceforth lead a peaceful life, and grow to a hoary age as an open town, undisturbed by the ever-green Oriental Question. But the wisdom of patriots who looked beyond the narrow present, whose searching gaze discovered the tiniest of black specks on a pink horizon, found a way out of the difficulty, succeeding in doing so without arousing suspicion. It is true that most of the heavy ordnance was sold and handed over to Roumania by route of Calafat, that some of the river-terraces were transformed into promenades, and some of the inland batteries into meaningless mounds. But the skeleton of the two *enceintes* on the land side remained, looking west, significantly, grim mementos of the stormy past in the calm of the present, waiting quietly until the brazen call of the bugles should hurl battalion upon battalion of blue-clad warriors against the fire-spitting appliances of modern ingenuity, until once more—and, I fervently hope, for the last time—death and devastation should reign supreme on the historic marshes beyond the city wall.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE BATTENBERGER

Showing the general course of events in Bulgaria between the years 1878 and 1885.

"The Crown a lonely splendour."
TENNYSON.

EVENTS in Bulgaria marched with giants' strides, although along a path beset with thorns and pitfalls. On the 23rd February 1879 the first Sobranyé met in Tirnova. On the 29th April, Alexander of Battenberg, one of the four morganatic sons of a German princelet of the house of Hesse, was elected to be the ruler of Bulgaria, under the nominal suzerainty of the Sultan and the non-acknowledged but powerful influence of Almighty Russia. On the 9th July the Prince made oath on the bran new constitution in Tirnova, and a little later the seat of government was transferred to Sofia. Towards the end of 1879 the Skuptchina, composed of Muscovite favourites and hirelings, usurped the power to such a degree as reduced the ruler to a cypher. For a year and a

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half the energetic young prince suffered in silence, but on the 9th May 1881 he asserted his rights and manifested his character by a *coup d'état*, which made away with the semi-Russian ministry; and on the 13th July the new Skuptchina granted to the sovereign unanimously the seven years' absolute power which he had demanded.

But the Russification of Bulgaria, planned and initiated with infinite pains, required a stronger dose to lay it low than a *coup* which merely felled a docile Ministry and created a hostile Government. As yet all the principal official posts were in Russian hands, or in hands slavish to the Russian cause, and almost the whole body of officers in the new Bulgarian army was a solid phalanx of Russians. The strong dose that was needed was, quite unexpectedly, and presumably as much to the astonishment of the prince as to that of Europe, supplied by the bloodless Philippopolis rebellion of 1885, which liberated East Roumelia from the nominal yoke of Turkey, and ended by delivering "Both Bulgarias" from the non-official but far heavier halter of Muscovite influence, cunning, corruption, and intrigue.

By the decree of the Berlin Congress East Roumelia had reverted to Turkey, although self-government and the right to maintain a native militia were granted to the province. In the hands

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of the Russian agitators, spies, consuls, and officers, the Turkish officials were nonenities.

On the 18th September 1885 there occurred in Philippopolis, the capital, one of the most remarkable revolutions known to modern history: the Bulgarian populace of that city rebelled against the Ottoman Government, sent the Turkish officials about their business, ignored the Russian agents and officers, and proclaimed the union of Bulgaria and East Roumelia as one autonomous Principality.

Originally instigated by Russia, the rebellion took a course directly opposed to that nation's wishes and intentions, a course which the Russian politicians had not dreamt of or provided for. The aim which Muscovite statecraft had undoubtedly had in view was to cause rupture and bloodshed between Turkey and East Roumelia, in which case she, Holy Russia, would have appeared upon the scene in her time-honoured rôle of pretended liberator, and would have brought a fine province under her thumb—a task which she had vainly essayed already in 1878. But the unexpected always happens. Prince Alexander, treating Russian schemes and intrigues, hints and commands, with the contempt they deserved, identified himself with the revolutionary movement, proclaimed on the 19th September in Tirnova the union of the "Two Bulgarias," and arrived on the 20th in Philippopolis

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to assume the reins of government. The autonomous Principality of United Bulgaria was an accomplished fact, and Russia was nonplussed. From this moment there was an incurable rupture and a deadly hatred between the two Alexanders. The Czar, in order to proclaim his dissatisfaction with the course of events, recalled the Russian officers serving in the Bulgarian army, and the vacant places were filled by the young lieutenants and captains of the native militia.

The unique feature of the Philippopolis rebellion lies in the fact, that the liberation of a large and populous province from the supremacy of an empire which could place a million armed men in the field was accomplished with the loss of only three human lives: one, an engine-driver, who had been overworked to such an extent during the concentration of troops, that he fell asleep, never to wake again, in the cab of his engine, leaving the task of bringing the train home safely to his stoker; the second, an officer of gendarmes, who, when attempting to arrest the Russian official in charge of the Philippopolis post-office, accused of peculation, was shot by the latter; the third, this official, whom the infuriated gendarmes killed in the scuffle.

Another remarkable and somewhat comical incident I cannot forbear to mention, since I was acquainted with the heroine of the exploit, a

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beautiful but none too puritan damsel, Servian by birth, Bulgarian by residence and sentiment, whom I had met in Widdin in the year of war 1877. Astride a spirited horse, picturesquely attired, formidably armed, and smoking cigarette after cigarette with the utmost nonchalance, this delightful blend of devilry and womanhood made herself so conspicuous in the streets of Philippopolis during those tumultuous days, that, at her urgent entreaty, the task of conveying the Turkish officials to the frontier was entrusted to her. Verily, an inglorious end to the hermaphroditic reign of Russia and Turkey in East Roumelia, which never did work well, and never could have done so.

Acting upon the earnest remonstrances of Austria, Germany, and England, Turkey abstained from military operations with a forbearance and an unselfishness that have never been sufficiently acknowledged; for it had been made manifest to her that the sending of a single battalion across the East Roumelian frontier would set the world aflame, by bringing about a European war of unequalled dimensions and undreamt-of horrors. This war was what Christian Russia had desired and worked for, and what despised Turkey avoided, by her humanity and indulgence, to the benefit of Europe and mankind.

United Bulgaria, nevertheless, made strenuous

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exertions to meet the oncoming storm. But the cloud burst in an unexpected quarter. Turkey remained inert in the East, whilst Servia's armies, at Russia's secret mandate, crossed the western frontier on the 14th November 1885. A pretended (and most probably non-existent) boundary transgression on the part of some Bulgarian gendarmes furnished Servia with a pretext for the declaration of hostilities.

Grandly United Bulgaria rose to the occasion. Differences of creed and race were forgotten, wrongs condoned, grievances laid aside never to be revived, and with masterly strategy the hero-prince hurled every available man against the foe.

In these eight years of storm and stress, during which Bulgaria worked out her own salvation, Widdin had but been as a unit to the whole, and the history of the town presents no distinctive features. Trade had been excellent, and the filigree industry was flourishing. To several international exhibitions of the period both Widdin and Lom Palankah had sent specimens of exquisite workmanship. The Turkish inhabitants remaining after the exodus of 1878 had not only grown used to the new order of things, but had ended by liking the Christian institutions which the authorities had introduced or elaborated, such as effective participation in municipal and central government,

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sanitary police, religious tolerance, popular education, census, and other features of Western advancement. Conscription was the one sore point.

Also in its external appearance the town had vastly improved. The rebuilding after the Roumanian bombardment had made away with many slums, alleys, and hovels; new bazaars had been laid down; the unhealthy *intra muros* cemeteries were demolished;[48] streets were named and houses numbered; a supply of water, systems of drainage and sewage, a regular and reliable postal service had been established, with other innovations too numerous to mention, to which we in the West, regarding them as matters of course, pay hardly any heed.

The fear of Bulgarian retaliation for Turkish misgovernment had vanished. Excepting a few street rows and wine-house brawls at the commencement, all classes, races, and creeds lived and worked side by side in perfect harmony, and to each the same impartial justice was dealt out.

The Philippopolis rebellion fired the town. "One Bulgaria, one prince, and absolute independence," was the popular cry. But when darksome rumours of Servian interference made themselves heard, the community rose as one man against the ruthless aggressor. The Moslems, too, were loud in their indignation, zealous in their

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combative desire, unswerving in their loyalty to the prince. Strenuous exertions were made to place the town in a state of defence. The tiny speck in the western horizon of rose-colour, which long-headed and far-seeing men had descried seven years before, swelled to a vast thunder-cloud, and their wise measures bore splendid fruit.

Unwittingly Servia supplied the one impetus that was needed to create the idea of Bulgarian nationality, as yet slumbering in the dark ante-chamber of the world, and waiting to be called into raging life. What had been conceived in the streets of Philippopolis was consummated on the plain of Slivnitza and on the Danube marshes without Widdin. Bulgarian independence, patriotism, and national life, reborn amid the terrific labour-pains of the tenth Russo-Turkish War, attained triumphant majority under the guiding hand of a German princelet suddenly developed into a hero of the grandest type. The men of Bulgaria gave, before the eyes of the astounded world, the lie to the wide-spread calumnies which had reported them as cowards by habit and temperament, and overthrew the danger coming to them, not from the now senile Empire of the Ottomans, but from the northern nation, erstwhile their alley and pretended liberator, in whose hands Servia was but a willing tool.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE THUNDER OF SLIVNITZA

Giving an outline of the Servo-Bulgarian War of November 1885.

"Like fire he meets the foe,
And strikes him dead, for thine and thee."
TENNYSON.

THE Servo-Bulgarian War of 1885 exhibits a natural division in two distinct and separate (both locally and strategically), though simultaneous campaigns: that of Slivnitza and that of Widdin. Only with the latter are we rightly concerned here; but it will be necessary to examine cursorily the former, lest the reader should forgo a perfect understanding of this remarkable and interesting event of a fortnight's duration, which has been justly termed "the war of many surprises."

The September rebellion had naturally induced Prince Alexander to concentrate the greater part of the now united forces of Bulgaria and East Roumelia on the south-eastern frontier, from Philippopolis in the west to Burgas on the Black

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Sea in the east; for by way of Adrianople lay the likelihood of Turkish operations and advance: here, indeed, had strong Ottoman forces been assembled toward the end of September. In Tatar Bazardjik, Samakov, and Küstendil some small provision was made against the danger of a southern attack from the same source. But the western frontier, from Tern in the south to Bregovo in the north, was almost completely bared of troops; for who could foresee in such a crisis the treacherous and wicked aggression of brethren in race, creed, and language? It was only with the greatest difficulty and the utmost exertions that small garrisons could be collected in Widdin and Sofia when King Milan's secret intentions first dawned upon the unsuspecting Bulgars. To avoid exposing the capital to attack at the very outset of hostilities the force available for its defence (10,000 men) was stationed in a heavily entrenched position at Slivnitza, midway between Sofia and the frontier, and astride the highroad.

Thus King Milan had chosen his moment well when, on the 14th November 1885, he crossed the Bulgarian frontier. The very fact of his declaration of hostilities constituted the first surprise, and perchance the greatest of all. The Servian army was divided into two corps: a northern, styled the Timok army, commanded by General Leshjanin,

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and destined to operate against Widdin ; a southern, called the Nishava army, led, nominally, by the king in person, and intended to make straight for the Bulgarian capital, by way of the Dragoman Pass and the great Pirot-Sofia-Philippopolis high-road. This army consisted of four divisions and a cavalry brigade, mustering a total of over 40,000 men.

The Servians occupied Zaribrod, the Bulgarian frontier-station, on the 14th, and the Dragoman Pass on the 15th, both after sharp fighting with the small advanced guards of the Slivnitza detachment. On the morning of the 16th they descended into the plain of Sofia. Thus they had it all their own way in the beginning, and it looked dangerously like a "walk-over." Nothing stood betwixt them and the enemy's capital but the entrenched camp of Slivnitza, which they confidently expected to carry at the first onslaught. Quite unaccountably European sympathy was almost wholly with the Servians, and the press of all countries spoke of Prince Alexander with contumely and offensive pity as a doomed man.

On the same day (16th) the prince arrived in Slivnitza from Sofia. The moment when it had become manifest to him that Turkey would remain inert, and that Servia was the real foe, he had commanded the transfer of the Bulgo-Roumelian

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forces, by the quickest means possible and without a minute's delay, from the south-eastern part of his dominion to the extreme west, an average distance of 200 miles. But no single portion of it could arrive—or did actually arrive—in Slivnitza until the 18th at the earliest (and then only a few battalions); as a matter of fact it was not until the 20th, a day after the last scene had been enacted in the bloody drama of Slivnitza, that the gross of the army arrived on the spot, too late to share the laurels of that glorious fight, but in time for the second and decisive battle, that of Pirot. In baring his eastern and southern frontiers the prince had trusted to the magnanimity of the Sultan, and, as all the world knows, had not trusted in vain, which undeniable fact the Bulgars should ever gratefully remember.

I would fain linger on the three field-days of Slivnitza, 17th, 18th, and 19th November, when, to the amazement of the whole world, and the special blank surprise of the Servians themselves, the Bulgars achieved a brilliant victory against superior numbers. Never in all the blood-stained pages of military history was there more righteous cause than that of these aggrieved, insulted, causelessly challenged, ruthlessly attacked Bulgarians; and never has the strong arm of the God who guides all battles been more evident. I

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should like to speak of the cheerful sacrifice, of the astounding dash and bravery, of the patient suffering in snow and frost, in slush and fog, of the soldiers of the Slivnitza detachment, led almost wholly by officers who were mere boys in years and babes in experience, but men in triumphant execution; I should like to make special mention of Panitza's famous "robber brigade" and its successful daring, of Popoff's forlorn hope at Tern, of Gutscheff's bold initiative, of Prince Alexander's grand commandership, of the splendid behaviour of the ladies of Sofia. For if there is one feature divine in the history of mankind which exhibits so much of what is low and despicable, it is the rising of a roused people; if there is one sight that is heavenly on this miserable earth, it is the sight of a nation in arms against an aggressor. But in these pages I have been guilty of so many transgressions upon domains not appertaining to my self-imposed task, and the time when I shall have to bid good-bye to my readers is drawing so nigh, that I must confine myself to a bare record of accomplished facts, with one exception,—a scene which took place on the afternoon of the 20th November, the day after the battle, in the Slivnitza camp, then deserted by all except dogs and doctors, dead and dying (for the victorious troops were in red-hot pursuit of the routed foe), a scene of such

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inexpressible grandeur that it will live for ever in the memory of those who had the honour and the good-fortune to witness it.

Prince Alexander, accompanied by his personal staff, the members of his cabinet, the foreign journalists, and the diplomatic agents, was inspecting the improvised ambulances, and speaking words of comfort to the poor maimed fellows, when a young officer came up, breathless, and uttered these remarkable words: "If it please your Royal Highness, the Bulgarian army has arrived." For a moment the prince could not exactly comprehend the meaning of this laconic and mysterious message; but then it suddenly dawned upon him that the troops which had originally been concentrated on the Turkish frontier had at last arrived, that now all danger was past, and that United Bulgaria was strong enough for half-a-dozen Servias. And such was the case. The prince and his companions rode to the back of the Slivnitza position, and there stood in the little plain just east of it, faintly illuminated by the dying light of day, but perfectly visible by the glamour of endless files of rifles, of dense, bristling forests of bayonets—there stood the United Bulgarian–East Roumelian army, battalion by battalion, battery by battery, all in faultless order. And as the men caught sight of the prince's noble form looking like a veritable Lohengrin, a great shout went up into

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the dim heavens, where the very stars began to sparkle with joy, and the *nation* of Bulgaria was an accomplished fact.

In giants' marches they had come, through the snow and the slush and the rain, now knee-deep in the mire, now on solid ice, across trackless mountain ranges and vast forest solitudes, making 30 and 40 miles a day. One regiment had covered 63 miles in thirty-two hours, losing only 60 men out of 4500. This is of a surety the most stupendous performance of its kind ever accomplished, and leaves far behind even Osman Pasha's famous march from Widdin to Plevna, in which I had the honour to take part.

The three days' battle of Slivnitza cost the victors about 2000, the defeated about 3000 in killed and wounded. The former had also some hundreds of prisoners. The effect of the battle on the campaign was momentous to the belligerents, astounding to the onlooking world: it transformed with one blow that which had bidden fair to be a walk-over into utter rout; it changed Servian conquest of Bulgaria into the invasion of Servia by Bulgaria. Verily, contrast cannot be more marked! Unhappily, the war in its entirety remained without result to Bulgaria, thanks to the vicious interference of European diplomacy. But if the material gain was *nil* to the victors,

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a spiritual result of the gravest and farthest reaching nature ensued; for there was born on the blood-stained field of Slivnitza the idea of Bulgarian nationality. The thunder of cannon, the clatter of company-fire, the clash of steel, the brazen clang of the "Djumi Maritza" had roused Bulgaria to those most noble virtues—national pride and love of the land.

The now complete Bulgarian army, mustering 50,000 men, followed close on the heels of the retreating Servian. The Dragoman Pass was retaken by storm (22nd Nov.), and in the night of the 22nd to the 23rd the fugitive Milan slept for the last time on Bulgarian soil, in the dirty khan of dirtier Zaribrod. During the next night Alexander the pursuer occupied the self-same bed. What an irony of fate! And in the cellar of this house a mining engineer had stored—without any evil intention, though unknown to the occupants—enough dynamite to blow all the thrones of the globe into eternity. But then rulers and monarchs proverbially "dance on volcanoes!" The bed had not been made since Milan's slumber, haunted by fear more than by remorse, had been rudely disturbed at two in the morning by alarm-beating drums; there was the water in which he had washed himself—useless task! for his hands were steeped in the blood of brethren,—and there was

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his correspondence scattered over the floor, some of it diplomatic, much of it amorous, and the fragment, also, of a letter to his ambitious and unscrupulous spouse.

Events followed each other in red-hot procession. On the 25th Milan, with contemptible cowardice, left the army to seek the comparative safety of his capital and the solace of his handsome wife's embraces. On the following day the Bulgarian forces crossed the frontier, on the very spot by which, twelve short days before, the Servians had confidently and triumphantly passed in the opposite direction. On this day and the next (26th and 27th) the sanguinary battle of Pirot was fought, which constituted the last stand of the Servian army, and resulted in the defeat of the latter, the capture of that town by the Bulgars, and a total of casualties of nearly 5000 men, pretty equally divided. The morning of the 28th brought the crowning surprise: Count Khevenhüller, the Austrian ambassador in Belgrad, arrived in Prince Alexander's quarters, and an hour later an armistice had been concluded, which was not broken and led subsequently to peace.

What had possessed the Bulgar prince—who was certainly no *fainéant*—to interrupt so suddenly and incomprehensibly the onward march of his

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victorious army? Simply this: the Viennese statesman had intimated to him that if his troops made another step forward on Servian territory Austria would consider herself to be in a state of hostility towards Bulgaria.[49] Thus the latter was robbed of all the benefits of her victories, for a conference of the representatives of the Powers vetoed even the payment of an indemnity. And as to the natural and praiseworthy aspiration of the Bulgarians for a royal crown, for acknowledged independence, for the official recognition of Europe, it was treated with contempt. Things remained simply *in statu quo ante;* the frontier line was not altered to the extent of an inch, and not a single coin changed hands. Surely a piece of gross injustice towards the provoked party, and an unnecessary clemency with that worthless, spoilt child, Milan of Servia.[50]

But the war had one result of which no ill-natured interference, no hatred or envy could rob the victors: the unity and the practical independence of "Both Bulgarias." And Servia had received a lesson. The echo of the thunder of Slivnitza will sound in her ears for many a year to come, and it is to be hoped that the campaign of 1885 will remain the third and last of her wicked wars of aggression.

The name Slivnitza is to-day to the Bulgarians what Sedan is to the Germans, Waterloo to the

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English, Plevna to the Turks: the national symbol of heroism and supreme sacrifice, the pride of the past, a warning in the present, and a hope for the future.

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CHAPTER XXIV

BONONIA LIBERATA

Giving an account of the struggle for Widdin during the Servo-Bulgarian War of November 1885.

"I have felt with my native land,
I am one with my kind."
TENNYSON.

IT behoves us now to examine the Widdin portion of the war of 1885, which was contemporary to the Slivnitza campaign — commencing on the 15th November, and ending two days after the other, on the 29th November—but which forms a separate strategical event.

General Leshjanin's "Timok army" consisted of twenty-one battalions, three squadrons, two batteries of field artillery, one of mountain artillery, three of siege artillery—a total of 16,000 men and thirty-four guns. With the bulk or centre of these forces he crossed the Bulgarian frontier from Saitchar by the Vreska Chuka Pass on the 15th November. Thus he commenced his campaign a day after the

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southern army, by reason of having concentrated his corps in the first instance at Negotin, whence on second reflection a crossing of the Timok was not considered feasible for large masses, although I confess ignorance of the particular cause which moved the Servian leaders in this disposition.

It requires but little imagination to understand the terrific excitement which the proximity and the approach of the enemy, in all their overwhelming and disastrous suddenness, caused within the ancient city walls — a *Hannibal ad portas*, with a vengeance! Christians, Jews, and Moslems rose as one man; for whatever the internal dissensions of the past may have been, whatever the time-honoured grudge that still rankled in some minds, whatever the old scores that yet remained unpaid—to each and all Servia was an hereditary foe, a despoiler of the country's honour, an assailer of home, wife, and children, a cruel aggressor to whom no manner of provocation had been given, a cowardly relier on powerful countries in their dotage.

The Bulgarian force available for the defence of Widdin on the 15th November (called the Northern Division) consisted of fourteen battalions of infantry (including three of volunteers, two of which were composed entirely of Turks),[51] four batteries of field artillery of six guns each, twenty heavy guns, two squadrons of regular cavalry, and one of mounted

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volunteers—a total of 10,000 men. The commander was Major Usunoff.

These forces were distributed as follows:—Three battalions, two batteries, the heavy guns, and the cavalry in Widdin. One battalion in Bregovo; one in Adlié; three battalions in the villages between the last-named two places; two battalions and one battery in Osmanié (Alexandrovo); two battalions in Berkovitza; two battalions and one battery in Biélogradchik. In addition, there were three battalions and a few guns in Lom Palankah, which were ordered forthwith to Widdin.

In extreme hurry, and with the utmost zeal of all concerned, Widdin was placed in a state of defence, the redoubts of the old outer *enceinte* being effectively utilised.

The first contact between the hostile forces took place at Adlié, necessarily so, since that town lay midway between the crossing-place and Widdin, which was the avowed and known objective of the Servian operations. Here, shortly after noon on the 15th November, the Bulgarian battalion in possession, and the Servian vanguard of two battalions, came to hard blows. The Bulgarians had dug extensive trenches, from which they were thrown after a sharp encounter that cost them 200 men in killed and wounded, most of the latter being taken prisoners. The Servian losses have not been

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made known, but cannot have been less than the same figure.

There was nothing more to be done on that day, and Leshjanin stayed in Adlié, where the bulk of his centre came in during the evening and the night. On the next day, the 16th, two battalions were sent from Widdin and one from Osmanié, for the purpose of recovering Adlié. But these, instead of encountering the expected Servian vanguard, discovered half of the Timok army, and suffered a severe reverse, in spite of their conspicuous bravery, losing 1300 men in killed, wounded, and prisoners (that is, half of their *état*), with six ammunition waggons, and a large stock of arms and entrenching tools. Several hundred men dispersed; the remnants of the three battalions, about 1000 men, mostly rifleless, found their way to Widdin in disconsolate groups. Also of this affair the Servian losses have not been made public; from what I have heard, I estimate them at 1000 in killed and wounded. The two days' action of Adlié would thus yield an estimated total of casualties of 2700, proving a hotly contested fray, since the number of fighters did not exceed 10,000, namely, 3500 Bulgarians and 6500 Servians.

By this affair General Leshjanin felt himself justified in publishing abroad noisily the bombastic report of a "battle of Adlié," with thousands of slain

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and thousands of captives, with "awful slaughter," "glorious success," and other fantastical flourishes. But, to be sure, in this he merely pursued the course adopted by Tchernaieff in 1876, and latterly retrod, with much skill, by his lord and master, Milan, who from the moment of crossing the frontier up to the time that the victorious Bulgars stood actually before the gates of Pirot, deluded his subjects, and sought to deceive the entire European public, by barefaced lies of brilliant victories.

Also on the 16th, and up to the morning of the 17th, the Servian forces remained in Adlié, for the second field-day had left much to be done before a start could be made. Thus Usunoff had gained what he had sought to gain by his double resistance at Adlié: time, that is, no less than two full days. True, he had lost almost four battalions; but in warfare time is often of far greater importance than tactical units. The latter can be replenished, restored, or renewed; the former is lost irrevocably. And whereas on the 15th the three Lom Palankah battalions were still in their place of garrison, the three volunteer battalions were in course of formation, and the fortifications of Widdin in embryo, on the 17th the first had arrived in Widdin, the second stood ready, armed to the teeth, and the third had been finished.

In the meantime Leshjanin's left wing, consist-

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ing of six battalions, had stood leisurely along the left bank of the Timok, from its mouth up to Blovanovatz, in a long extended line of sentries, but, as events showed, sadly deficient in watchfulness. The Bregovo bridge had been destroyed by the Servians themselves, though with what object cannot be divined. In the dark and damp night of the 15th to the 16th, the Bulgarians in possession of the Bregovo position (four battalions, including those of the surrounding villages, which had been concentrated in and near the frontier-townlet) crossed the river in two places: at Bregovo by means of a hastily made and crude pontoon bridge, which broke down subsequently (on the 18th), when the Servians attempted to utilise it; and at Blovanovatz by a ford. A Servian company was surprised and captured. In the early morning, during an impenetrable mist, the six Servian battalions arrived pell-mell from all sides and pressed the Bulgarians back across the river, after a hot engagement. By two in the afternoon the action was over, having resulted in a loss of 90 dead and disabled, to the Bulgarians, and 100—dead, disabled, and captured —to the Servians. Also in this place the latter had lost an entire day, for the 16th had to be devoted to the restoration of order, since the troops had become hopelessly mixed during the fog.

Up to the 18th both parties remained in their

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positions—the one along the left, the other along the right Timok bank. A Servian battery of six pieces of heaviest calibre, entrenched permanently at Radujevatz (on the Danube, above the Timok mouth), pounded steadily on the luckless village Rakovitza, and was pluckily answered by a couple of pop-guns, which the Bulgarians had brought to the spot in pieces by row-boats from Widdin, where they had been discovered slumbering, enveloped in thick garments of dust and cobwebs, in the vaults of the disused citadel. This barking competition, between six huge mastiffs and two tiny toy-terriers, was entertaining and exhilarating, but not very effective, except as to the barns and cottages of deserted Rakovitza.

The Servian right wing consisted of three battalions and a battery. Two and the guns had crossed the Kadi Bogas Pass on the 15th November, without encountering serious resistance, and stood on the 16th and 17th within striking distance of Biélogradchik. One battalion got stuck in the San Nikolas Pass.

Thus of the three roads leading from Servia to Widdin, those of Bregovo, Adlié, and Biélogradchik, the central and most important was open to the opponent, while the two outer were but ineffectually barred. Usunoff decided, therefore, to confine himself to the defence of his city, and in this he was

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confirmed and upheld by the easy successes of the Nishava army up to the time that it knocked its head against the entrenchments of Slivnitza. The available troops were concentrated on the 18th and 19th behind the redoubts of the outer *enceinte*, Bregovo, Ghinzova, Osmanié, and all the townlets and villages being abandoned, except Biélogradchik. Reinforcements, ammunition, and supplies were ordered to proceed to Widdin by river from the lower Danube (Rahova, Nikopoli, Sistova, Silistria); but owing to the treachery of the skippers of some chartered steamers (who, bribed by the Russians, allowed the troops and stores to embark, and then refused to move, under various fictitious and pseudo-political excuses, thus causing serious delays), the first of the craft did not arrive until the 21st.

Throughout the campaign the Danube communication remained open to the Bulgarians, since the Servians had no craft wherewith to block it, and made no attempt to procure any. The Sofia-Widdin wire was cut on the 17th, and henceforth news from Sofia and Slivnitza could reach the defenders of Widdin only by mounted messengers making the *détour* of Berkovitza and Lom Palankah.

Thus Usunoff had in Widdin the whole of his force (except the two battalions and one battery of Biélogradchik, which remained there, as will be

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seen presently), augmented by three battalions and a few heavy guns from Lom Palankah, giving a total of 15 battalions of infantry, 18 field and 30 siege guns, and 3 squadrons of cavalry. The battalions were of greatly unequal strength; some of the regulars counted 1000, some of the fresh levies 300 men. After the losses already incurred, we must put the total of the Widdin garrison during the Servian investment at 8500 to 9000 men, including 1500 (mostly Turkish) volunteers. The Servian army of investment (from which the right wing has to be deducted, as will be seen) was of superior strength in infantry and cavalry, but weaker in guns, being 11,000 of the first, 500 of the second, 30 of the last, a total of 12,500 men, including gunners, engineers, and the numerous train. Even the most uninformed layman will see at a glance that this force was totally inadequate to attack or invest a place like Widdin, against which eight years before three splendid divisions, each nearly the strength of the entire Timok "army," had knocked their heads in vain. But also the besieged were at a serious disadvantage, owing to insufficiency of numbers, since 12,000 men and 150 guns is the smallest practicable force that can defend such a place. In the subsequent fights the Bulgarian soldiers had often to run from one redoubt to another, as they were required on this or that spot,

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since there was not enough human material to form a crew to each phase of the position.

We must now turn for a moment to the right wing of the Timok army—the three battalions and one battery operating against Biélogradchik. One of the former became, somehow or other, hopelessly blocked in the San Nikolas Pass, and retreated finally before the advance of a handful of Bulgars, mostly volunteers, without having reached the boundary line. The battery and two battalions began to shell and assail the decrepit but picturesque fort of Biélogradchik (a Roman relic), on the morning of the 18th. To the astonishment of all concerned, the Bulgarian garrison of two battalions not only responded in the most vigorous and effective manner with the six guns they had on the spot, but in the afternoon made a dashing sally which completely routed the foe. The Serbs, leaving 100 dead and wounded, and 250 unwounded prisoners behind, that is, one-fourth of their *état*, fled in wild disorder to the Kadi Bogas Pass, and later (on the 23rd) back across the frontier into Servia and safety. The Bulgarian force lost less than 50 men. Operations in this part of the theatre of war had come to an untimely end, to one not flattering to Servia, and were not resumed.

Meanwhile the bulk of General Leshjanin's army (centre and left wing) advanced on Widdin with a

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slowness that is astonishing. On the 23rd the investment was complete—that means it had taken the Servians ten days to make the journey from the frontier to the city gates, an average of 25 miles. True, the weather was awful—rain, slush, snow, fog, frost and thaw, charming in variety and constant in their recurrence—and the roads were execrable.

On the 18th the centre was at Gramadi, near which locality a serious but resultless fight took place with a Bulgarian detachment retreating from one of the villages towards Widdin. The losses in this affair have not been made known, but cannot have been trifling.

On the 19th (the third and last field-day of Slivnitza) the left wing was at Ghinzova, the centre at Osmanié. The latter formed its own right wing (three battalions and a battery) on receipt of the disastrous news from Biélogradchik, and sent it to Vidbol, "to watch the Danube." There is no doubt that the Danube was watched assiduously for many days, but it flowed on in irritating contempt of the watchers, and carried on its broad back, hugging closely the Roumanian shore, steamer after steamer, barge after barge, boat after boat, of ammunition and victuals, from Lom Palankah to Widdin, whilst the Servian shells struck the middle of the waterway and did no more harm than sending occasionally a dash of spray into the faces of the skippers. How

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very annoying that state of things must have been to the brave Serbs whose arduous task it was "to watch the Danube"!

It will be seen that the centre had not made from Adlié straight for Widdin, but had marched the longest way round, that of Gramadi, Osmanié, then back by the Vidbol road and to Tatardjik. The report, which spread through the Bulgar camps at that time, that Leshjanin had abandoned his attempt upon Widdin, and was marching to the aid of the Nishava army, may have had some truth in it, in which case it is probable that the general, on the 20th, that is, on receipt of the news of the Servian failure at Slivnitza, gave up his second plan, and returned to court his first love, Widdin. If this theory is not correct, then Leshjanin's intention in choosing the longest and the worst road is not comprehensible. As a matter of fact the Servian centre marched 37 miles, whereas it need have done but 18.

On the 20th the left wing remained in Ghinzova; the centre occupied Tatardjik and Belerada; the right wing continued to contemplate religiously the Danube at Vidbol.

On the 21st all three detachments remained in their positions owing to atrocious weather. The first steamer from Lom Palankah, towing three barges choke-full of supplies, arrived in Widdin.

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On the 22nd the left wing advanced to Inova, the centre stayed where it was, the right wing occupied Artzar with a half battalion, facing east, toward Lom Palankah and the danger of hostile approach from the lower Danube. The Bulgarians occupied and entrenched Novoselo.

On the 23rd the investment was complete, and this was the Servian position:—

Left wing: 6 battalions and 10 guns. Bulk and artillery in and around Inova and Smerdan; small detachments in Kapitanovtzé, Kerimbey, Koshava.

Centre: 9 battalions, 3 squadrons, 14 guns. In two detachments, one in and around Rayanovtzé, the other in Tatardjik; entrenched outpost in Ruptza, reserves in Belerada.

Right wing: 3 battalions and 6 guns. One and a half battalions and the battery in and near Vidbol, one battalion in Nazir Mahalla, a half battalion in Artzar.

The headquarters were in Belerada, the artillery park was to the rear of Smerdan.

The Bulgarians confined themselves to the city, the redoubts of the old outer *enceinte* marking their extreme outer line, with three exceptions: Ali Bey, Novoselo, and the Chuban bridge on the Artzar road, which had played such a prominent part during the Roumanian siege. In the former they had one battalion, in the second, two, and two guns.

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As to the bridge, the Servians had feebly occupied it on the 22nd; but at dawn on the following day a Bulgarian battalion easily dispossessed them, and entrenched itself on this point.

At noon on this day (23rd) General Leshjanin despatched an officer with a flag of truce and a letter, summoning the commandant to surrender his town and his troops. Usunoff sent back the three or four men who had accompanied the *parlementaire* with the verbal message, "that for the present he desired the companionship of their amiable principal; and as to the general's preposterous demand for surrender, he was requested to reflect a little on the tidings which had no doubt reached him from the beaten and flying remnants of the Nishava army." For in the forenoon the glorious news had reached Widdin of the brilliant Bulgarian victory on the 19th, the third field-day of Slivnitza.

The *parlementaire*, a young lieutenant, was taken to the old serai, was accommodated in its best chamber, in front of a roaring wood-fire, and was entertained with the most sumptuous repast that the culinary resources of the town could procure, in order to impress him with the wealth of the Bulgarian stores. In solitary grandeur he sat there, consuming dish after dish, and draining bumper after bumper, whilst ever the grave and tongue-tied servants placed fresh viands and full decanters before him; and without

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the batteries crashed and the heavy guns thundered. At nightfall he was laid, hopelessly drunk, in an old cart, to which a venerable Smerdan horse was attached that knew the road by heart, and without the guidance of whip or rein ; and in this state, having had affixed to his coat a label, "Returned with thanks," the unhappy youngster reached his pitiless comrades.

The shelling on this day, the first exchange of projectiles that took place in front of Widdin, was of no effect to either side, though vigorous for some hours. The Servians hardly reached the Bulgarian outposts, and *vice versâ*. Not a single shot struck a single redoubt of the outer *enceinte*.

In the evening Leshjanin despatched two columns —one from Tatardjik, the other from Vidbol—for the recovery of the Chuban bridge, before whose approach the Bulgarian battalion in possession had to retreat hastily to Widdin to prevent being cut off. The Servians occupied the bridge, and stayed there unchallenged till the end.

On the 24th November the fight for Widdin began in earnest. The Danube happened to be exceedingly high at that period, which had enabled the Bulgarians to fill not only the old ditch, but also to flood most of the marshes and meadows, so that the town, now almost an islet, was approachable only by the roads, and these were well-nigh impracticable,

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soaked as they were by the recent continuous rains. Although it froze repeatedly during the struggle, yet it thawed again daily, so that neither marshes nor ditches nor brooks were made passable by ice. So far as meteorological circumstances were concerned, the Bulgarians enjoyed the best possible conditions for defence, whereas eight years before the Turks had suffered under the worst.

On this day the Servians charged the Bulgarian positions at Novoselo and Ali Bey, and mastered them after tenacious fighting. They lost 50 men in killed and wounded, the Bulgarians double that number. The latter got all their disabled and their two guns into Widdin, whither the defeated three battalions retired in good order.

Both places were occupied by the Servians, and strengthened with earthworks.

Thus the Bulgarians had lost their three and only *extra muros* positions—the Chuban bridge, Novoselo, Ali Bey—and were now confined to the city proper. In the end this may have been to their profit, considering the inadequacy of their numerical strength; in any case they derived no serious disadvantage from it, since the shells of the Servian guns at Ali Bey never reached the town.

On the 25th November the Bulgarians seized the offensive, commencing a heavy cannonade two hours before morning dawned, and at daylight a

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strong infantry attack was undertaken upon the earthworks around Ali Bey and Novoselo. The Servians, however, defended their newly-acquired possession bravely, and finally (at dawn) the assailants had to retreat.

Towards eleven in the forenoon General Leshjanin sent a *parlementaire* to his opponent, requesting a short cessation of hostilities, to await the result of the negotiations for truce which were then pending between the Bulgarian Slivnitza and the Servian Nishava armies, just prior to the crossing of the frontier at Zaribrod by the former.[52]

Usunoff sent the *parlementaire* back with a message that a verbal reply would be forwarded. This he despatched by flag of truce at two in the afternoon, running somewhat as follows :—

"The commandant of Widdin has received the Servian general's letter, in which a written reply is solicited. The commandant has no time to write letters. He declines to stay hostilities until he receives a command to that effect from his sovereign, King Alexander of Bulgaria. Should the Servian general require, nevertheless, a cessation of enmity on his own account, independent of affairs at headquarters, he can have same on evacuating all the villages within such and such a radius from Widdin,[53] but on no other condition whatever. This offer lapses at three o'clock."

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In giving his sovereign the royal title by anticipation, Usunoff expressed the general wish of the Bulgarian people, which, just after Slivnitza, was ardent and noisy. That it remained unfulfilled is due to the interference of Europe, traceable to no tangible cause.

During these negotiations the cannonade went on uninterrupted on both sides, and just at 3 P.M. it became deafening. An hour later, towards dusk, three Servian battalions advanced at a quick step along the Adlié road, towards the nearest redoubt, and occupied the disused cemetery in front of it, but were finally compelled to retreat to Novoselo in face of the violent rifle fire of the defenders in the *enceinte*.

There can be no doubt that on this day (25th) Leshjanin had intended to undertake a general attack upon the Widdin position, and that the advance of the three battalions was meant either as a prologue to the storm, or as a feint to conceal the movements in other quarters. Whilst the fight in the cemetery was in progress columns were organised in all parts of the Servian camp, and from some points (Smerdan and the Chuban bridge) troops started in battle formation. But whether the non-success at the Adlié gate disheartened the Servian commander, or whether the waning day rendered further operations impracticable, the fact remains that the advancing columns were called back before

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they had reached rifle range. The undertaking was certainly most badly planned, and the arrangements were so faulty as to court failure. The Bulgarian commander had been apprised of the hostile movements by the look-outs continually stationed in such of the minarets as remained after the Roumanian siege, and had made all his arrangements, including the storing of explosives to blow up the Adlié gate in case the enemy should attempt to force it. It was to the advantage of either party that a general action was avoided, which would probably have had no tangible result, and which would have demanded some thousands of victims.

Both parties lost on this day about 100 men in killed and wounded.

On the 26th (the day of the Bulgarian frontier crossing at Zaribrod, and the first field-day of Pirot) the cannonade was renewed at dawn. The Bulgarians advanced infantry and light guns on the road towards the Chuban bridge, but retreated before a strong Servian demonstration without having come to rifle range. At dark the Servians were observed to move some heavy guns from Tatardjik to Novoselo, and in consequence of the soaked ground they had attached fifty to sixty oxen to each piece. One gun got hopelessly stuck in the mud, and could be extricated only some days later. In the night the Servians worked hard at entrench-

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ments throughout the length of their line. In their camp a serious dearth of artillery ammunition had made itself felt, strict economy was enjoined, and the left wing had been silent. The shelling of the day cost either party about fifty men.

On the 27th (the second field-day of Pirot) the most serious engagement of the Widdin campaign took place. The Bulgarians had made all preparations for an extensive sortie, which was commenced in the middle of the night (3.30 A.M.) by a column of five battalions, with cavalry and some light guns. The Bulgarian objective was a spot about midway between the Chuban bridge and Tatardjik, a point feebly manned by the Servians, whither led a disused though practicable track. The night was dark; a drizzling rain fell. Simultaneous with the main advance a battalion and some cavalry demonstrated against Novoselo and Ali Bey, and a few companies against the Chuban bridge. Usunoff had also arranged with the commandant of Lom Palankah (where fresh troops had arrived from the lower Danube) for a rear attack upon the Servian outpost at Artzar. In the Widdin territory the action commenced at 5 A.M., and was over at dawn; in the Artzar neighbourhood the fighting did not begin until day had fairly set in, and lasted for nearly thirty-six hours. I shall relate the two phases of the combat separately.

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The Bulgarian project was to take the Servian right wing between two fires, and keep meanwhile the centre and left wing engaged by shelling and demonstration. Had the right wing been routed or even dislodged, the centre could have been attacked in the bared flank and "rolled up," in which case the total defeat of the Timok army might have ensued. The plan was good, no doubt; that it was wrecked was due to three causes: firstly, the awful weather—always a demoralising factor to an assailer and an assistant to a defender[54]—and the well-nigh impassable ground; secondly, the inadequate strength with which the main attack was undertaken (2500 men, whereas it ought to have been at least 4000); thirdly, the non-keeping of their appointment by the Lom Palankah force. Honour to whom honour is due, and I would gladly mention, as fourthly, the really admirable bravery of the Serbs on that day, particularly of the little force in Artzar, were not that factor counterbalanced by the equally conspicuous conduct of the Bulgarian main column in its attack. Altogether, the fight in front of Widdin on the 27th November is to the credit of both countries.

As regards the main action, the Bulgarian column, under cover of darkness and a heavy cannonade, got unperceived to the Servian front lines, and carried the first trenches by sheer sur-

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prise, a second and stronger set of earthworks on the point of the bayonet. Meanwhile, at the Chuban bridge, on the left flank of the assailants, and in front of Novoselo on their right, small detachments held the enemy fully and cleverly engaged. In this part of the battlefield the dispositions were adequate and practical; the appointments were admirably kept, and the instructions faithfully carried out. A feint was also made in the direction of Kerimbey.

The Servians rallied with great promptitude, and almost the whole detachment in and around Tatardjik charged the Bulgars when they had hardly recovered breath after their headlong rush. In the impenetrable darkness of a winter morning, with pitch-black, drizzling clouds spread over the entire vault of the heavens, with the ground a morass and the tracks little rivers, a fight at close quarters of the most ferocious description took place. There was little rifle fire; bayonet and butt-end did the work effectively, as in grim silence the men slaughtered each other. Sometimes there was a feeble spark from an officer's revolver, and ever and anon one heard two men challenging each other to deadly combat or to a hand-grip, as the accent of the reply would dictate. In the meantime you saw to the distant right and left, where the tactical units were unbroken, the long straggling

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lighting of company volleys, like golden snakes writhing on the ground, accompanied by a clatter as of falling chains; and withal the higher crash of the field-guns imparted a note of discord to the continuous boom of the siege monsters.

The Bulgarians held their own for some time, but had finally to yield; their leader,—Usunoff himself,—having listened in vain for the sound of combat Artzar-way, made the buglers blow, first collection, then retreat. The detachments at Novoselo and the Chuban bridge followed suit. All was over before the winter morning had dawned upon the scene of carnage.

The Bulgarian losses were heavy,—550 killed and wounded, most of the latter being taken prisoners. The Servian casualties amounted to over 200. About 6000 men had been actually engaged, of which nearly 800 suffered death or hurt.

At Artzar a separate engagement took place, which was meant to be simultaneous with the main action, but which did not commence until the other was over. In the evening of the 26th a column, consisting of two battalions, one squadron, and four guns, had started from Lom Palankah; but the weather and the condition of the tracks were so bad that not until after daybreak on the 27th did the force encounter the half-battalion stationed at

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Artzar. The Servian commander at this point had received warning of the enemy's approach, and the plan to surprise him failed. He had made all arrangements, sent notice to Nazir Mahalla and Vidbol, as well as to headquarters, and had prepared the old Turkish redoubt on the Danube [55] for vigorous resistance. The Bulgarians charged as soon as they had arrived, and carried both redoubt and town after a hotly contested fight of nearly two hours' duration, which length of time must be considered as proof conclusive of Servian bravery, for the assailants had 1400 men to the defending 300, and four guns to none. About mid-day (27th) the Nazir Mahalla battalion joined the retreating Servian troops, and together they charged the Artzar redoubt, but were beaten off. During the night of the 27th to the 28th a half-battalion with two guns, which had started from Vidbol to assist the defeated comrades, lost its way in the impenetrable darkness, and was surprised by the Bulgarian cavalry. The result was a charge, a brief fight, a terrible confusion, and the dispersal of the Servian troops, who had to leave one gun in the hands of the victors and the other in a swamp. At daybreak most of the defeated soldiers found their way to Nazir Mahalla singly or in small groups.

Early on that day (28th) there was an undecided skirmish of advanced posts half-way between Nazir

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Mahalla and Artzar. The Bulgarians fortified themselves in the Artzar redoubt, the Servians at Nazir Mahalla, but no further fighting took place.

The various actions around Artzar had cost the Bulgars over 100 men. The Servians stated their losses at fifty men and one gun; but this is either a mistake or a wilful under-estimation. I should put them at treble that figure. The Bulgars had taken forty prisoners; the Servians claim to have had twenty.

To return to the Widdin camp. On the day of the futile Bulgarian sortie (27th) the heaviest cannonade took place which had occurred so far. The Servians, who had meanwhile received ammunition from Saitchar, fired 700 shots, the Bulgarians over 1000. This gives an approximate average of twenty shots per gun in eight hours (the shelling ceased after noon). Hitherto the average daily expenditure (from the 23rd to the 26th inclusive) had been about 160 shots on the Bulgarian side, or four shots per gun, and 300 shots on the Servian side, or eight shots per gun.

The total loss of the 27th, in dead and disabled men, was 700 to the Bulgarians, and 400 to the Servians. The fighters actually engaged had numbered barely 8000.

During the night of the 27th to the 28th the

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Servians were noticed to labour assiduously at their earthworks by the light of lanterns.

On the 28th, the day of the armistice at Pirot, there was a continuous slow cannonade on both sides, lasting from dawn until six in the evening. The Bulgarian commander, unaware of the truce, had planned a general sortie for the coming night, and elaborate preparations were made, care being taken to keep all movements concealed from the enemy's observatories on the hill-tops, and secret from the inhabitants. The direction intended was the Chuban bridge, and the commandant of the detachment of Artzar had been enjoined to co-operate, by messenger sent in a boat. But a deserter betrayed the plan to the enemy, and to ward off the threatened attack the Servians commenced at 10 P.M. the most violent cannonade of the whole war, to which the Bulgarians responded with hearty good-will. So terrific was the thunder that the Bulgarians heard it at Pirot, 60 miles away. The hail of shells rendered infantry operations impossible, and the sortie was delayed for twenty-four hours, a notice to that effect being sent to Artzar by swift row-boat. The bombardment lasted until midnight, and when it ceased there was until daybreak a succession of fights on all points of the line, none of which had any result, but in all of which the Servians were the offenders.

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Whilst this was going on, Usunoff received by steamer from Lom Palankah the news of the truce, the articles of which had been signed at Pirot at 3 P.M. He despatched immediately a message to the prince, complaining bitterly of the Servian general's continued aggression, and countermanded the adjourned sortie. Leshjanin, in his subsequent report to the king, explained that the order to cease hostilities did not reach him until at early morning of the 29th; but there are those who allege that he had received it already at dusk on the 28th,[56] and that he had ignored it for the purpose of making a last attempt upon Widdin. If this be so, then he has been guilty of a grave violation, not only of international law, but also of all precepts of equity and humanity. The truth will probably never be known. As it usually happens in such cases, the accusations were reciprocal.

If the succession of petty local fights during the night of the 28th to the 29th constitute Leshjanin's last grand attempt on the Virgin Fortress, then his project was utterly impracticable and unsoldier-like. Widdin could have been carried only by a powerful assault upon one point, or two points at the most, with demonstrations and feints in other quarters. As it was, he frittered away his strength in separate and insignificant attacks extending

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over the whole semicircle of investment. The Bulgarians confined themselves throughout strictly to the defensive, each officer having been advised of the truce concluded at headquarters.

The 28th, being the last day of the Widdin campaign, was also the day of the heaviest shelling, the Servians having spent 1200, the Bulgarians 1500 shots, or an average of thirty-four shots per gun in fifteen hours. As a result the Servians had completely shot themselves out, and it was fortunate for them that the next day was one of peace, for they received no fresh supplies until the 30th. Also in Widdin a dearth of ammunition had set in. The losses in men of that day, including the fighting during the night to the 29th, were about 200 on either side.

At nine in the morning of the 29th November, Leshjanin caused a white flag to be hoisted on the hill-top between Inova and Smerdan, and despatched a *parlementaire* from the latter village. At the same time the Bulgarian commandant sent a message, and the two flags of truce met halfway on the Smerdan road. The weather did not share in the celebrations of peace which took place in both camps: the earth was veiled in fog, and the sky wept dismally, in the shape of drizzling and respiteless rain.

A long and undignified haggling betwixt Lesh-

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janin and Usunoff ensued with respect to the line of demarcation. The former had the incredible assurance to claim a line in the open, extending straight from Artzar to Biélogradchik, the Servians to be to the west, the Bulgarians to the east of it, which arrangement would have involved the evacuation of Widdin by the latter. This preposterous demand was treated with the contempt it deserved best — silence. Finally (about the 3rd December), such a line was laid down as caused both parties to remain in the positions they then occupied.

The struggle for Widdin had lasted just a fortnight, the investment proper a week. It had cost the Servians 2500, the Bulgarians 3000 men, in killed and wounded; the former had taken 1000, the latter 400 prisoners. The aggregate of fighters was below 30,000, the proportion of casualties being thus over 18 per cent. The number of men incapacitated by illness was exceptionally heavy, being six to seven hundred in each camp. If we include these, the proportion is 23 per cent.

As to special features of the Widdin campaign, one, the almost incredible slowness of the Servian movements prior to the investment, has already been noticed. Another is the small number of guns engaged on either side. It is probably without precedent in the history of sieges, that the

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beleaguerers had 30, the defenders less than 50 guns; and these figures appear doubly ridiculous when the size, situation, and importance of the objective are considered. A third trait is the dearth of officers in either camp, particularly of men of ripe age, superior rank, or warlike experience. In the Servian army, to mention an instance, three batteries of six pieces each were commanded entirely by non-commissioned officers, and the large train, comprising 500 carts and 1500 draught-oxen, was in charge of a junior lieutenant of twenty summers. The Bulgarian commander was a major under forty years of age; there were only two other majors beside him, the rest of the officers in charge of 9000 men being youthful captains and lieutenants. The moving factor in Usunoff's staff was reported to be a sergeant, formerly of the Turkish army, and a veteran of the Plevna campaign.[57]

The conduct of the troops on either side is worthy of the highest praise. The feeling of "war to the knife," which lasted throughout the campaign, and for some time afterwards (the whole of the Bulgarian and part of the Servian populace were averse to the truce), engendered conspicuous bravery, contempt of danger, and ready cheerfulness of sacrifice.

This is not a book of strategy, and I cannot presume to criticise; but mention may be made

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of the Servian sin of omission in not making a serious attempt to secure Biélogradchik, and none at all to capture Berkovitza. The latter could have been attacked from Pirot by the Kom Pass, and would undoubtedly have succumbed. As to the tactics of the Widdin campaign, the weak defence of Adlié was a Bulgarian mistake, and the non-blocking of the Danube—unless it was unavoidable, owing to financial or political conditions, which may have been the case — was certainly a grave Servian blunder, for without it there could never have been an investment in the proper sense of the word.

In this chapter I have not mentioned the condition of the inhabitants during the campaign. Owing to the non-interruption of the communication with Lom Palankah and with Calafat (where they had many sympathisers) the residents were kept fully supplied with all necessaries, and trade was quite brisk. No shells struck the town, and the public health was no worse than it would have been in peaceful circumstances. The spirit of the populace was excellent throughout.

Regarded in the light of a serious attempt to subdue and capture the town of Widdin, the campaign was, of course, an unqualified Servian failure. The shortness of time is no valid objection to this assertion, as, with the Danube navigation

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remaining open, this misnamed "siege" might have been prolonged indefinitely without causing any appreciable change in the position. But considered also in the less presumptuous light of a mere intention to neutralise hostile forces, the enterprise failed, since 16,000 Servian soldiers held in check only 9000 Bulgarians. From whatever point of view the campaign is examined one can arrive only at this result: that the Servian strategy was faulty, and the execution of its decrees replete with blunders.

With a brief acknowledgment of the admirable conduct of the Turkish volunteers in the defence of Widdin, I close my record of the latest attempt upon the fair fame of the Virgin Fortress.

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CHAPTER XXV

BONONIA BEATA

Giving an account of the armistice and the peace between Bulgaria and Servia, with special reference to Widdin and its subsequent fate.

November 1885 to March 1886.

"Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace."
TENNYSON.

PENDING the negotiations at headquarters the troops remained in their positions. There was a total absence of friendly intercourse, utterly unlike affairs between Turks and Roumanians on the same spot eight years before; of both parties the men were surly and suspicious, and the officers, whenever communication became unavoidable, treated each other with the coolest and barest civility. This state of things stands in striking contrast to affairs in the neighbourhood of Pirot. Here the outposts fraternised so cordially and so constantly that, had the war been continued,

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perhaps one-half of Milan's troops would have refused point blank to resume hostilities against their near kinsmen. Also in the wine-shops of Pirot the Bulgarian soldiers and the Servian inhabitants were in uninterrupted friendly communication, cursing, with much vigorous volubility and hearty good-will, the infamous policy which had brought about the spilling of blood of racial brethren. For, of a surety, King Milan's declaration of war upon Bulgaria counts among the most ruthless and rascally challenges of modern times.

It is a remarkable fact that nine Servian privates out of ten had believed, at the commencement of the campaign, that they were being led against the Turks. It was only during the first encounters, at Zaribrod on the 14th and at Adlié on the 15th November, when instead of the expected and hated red fez of old-established Ottoman enmity they beheld the blue képi of Bulgarian kinship, instead of the ragged banners of the Crescent the bran new colours of Bulgaria, that the truth dawned on them—that they, Christians, were killing fellow-Christians, that they, Slavs, were slaying brother Slavs.

The war was now practically over, having involved a total cost in dead and disabled of close on 20,000 men, or an average of 1400 a day,[58] and resulted in no material gain to the victor and no

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loss to the vanquished; but the negotiations for peace, commencing with Khevenhüller's first call on Alexander, occupied the better part of a month. The concession was graciously granted to Bulgaria that her territory should be the first to be evacuated by the enemy. Consequently, on Christmas Day 1885, the Timok army, amid snow and fog, broke up its bivouacs, to retire at Bregovo across the river into Servian domains, looking more like a herd of draggle-tail outcasts—on account of the atrocious weather which had reigned throughout—than like the brave and disciplined soldiers which they had undoubtedly proved to be. In any case they left without gain or glory to themselves, and without regret on the part of either side. Two days later (27th December) the Bulgarian Pirot army retreated by way of Zaribrod and Dragoman to Sofia. Peace was signed in Bukarest on the 1st March 1886, exactly nine years after Servia had concluded her treacherous and short-lived treaty with Turkey.

In the southern part of the theatre of war the Servian troops had been a week, in the northern six weeks, on Bulgarian soil. It is not only just and generous, but always pleasurable to record something in favour of an enemy. Circumstances have twice placed me in the position of a foe to that amiable but ill-governed people; nevertheless,

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I am glad to be able to bear testimony to the exemplary behaviour of the Servian soldiery on hostile soil, both before and after the truce, in the flush of victory as well as in the spite of defeat. Not a single sheep or fowl was stolen from a single Bulgarian peasant; not a twist of tobacco was taken from a village store, or a glass of brandy drunk in an alehouse without being paid for. Let the much-vaunted civilisation of England, France, and Germany take an example by that far less advanced nation! Unfortunately the Bulgarians did not reciprocate, and in the hour of triumph they forgot the obligations of gratitude and the sacred rights of humanity, as the woeful aspect of Pirot after the battle abundantly testified.[59]

There was joy in Widdin at the close of the year 1885. For the first time in history Turks and Bulgarians were united in the closest bonds of comradeship, forged in face of common danger, wrought by the force of arms, finished with common success. There was a day of thanksgiving and another of public jubilation, and the year 1886 dawned in gold and rose.

But in the subsequent Muscovite troubles and revolts "God made Himself an awful rose of dawn." Happily Widdin was spared the punishment inflicted on Sofia, Rustchuk, Burgas, Silistria.

The peace has not been broken on the Danube

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marshes. Widdin stands to-day, as it has stood during centuries, unconquered and impregnable. But within the old order of things is changed, and changed for the better, thanks to the inherent fitness of the Bulgarian people and the fresh breath of national life which the Battenberger infused into the country. Christian churches, Moslem temples, and Jewish synagogues adjoin each other. In marts and bazaars fezes and caps are seen in closest communication. And in the ranks of the Bulgarian army the Turkish recruit stands shoulder to shoulder with the Christian comrade, distinguished only by the absence of the cross on the kepi, and no less proud than the other in the sacred memories of Slivnitza, Pirot, and Widdin. The redoubts and bastions, though now dismantled, remain; but since events have manifested King Milan's true character, and alienated from him, his kin, and his country, the foolishly doting love of that ridiculous old woman, European diplomacy, the likelihood of those mounds ever spitting fire again is remote. Smaller still is the probability of martial activity on the other side of the town, the river quays, of the exchange of fiery greetings with the Wallachian neighbour; for the good understanding between Roumania and Bulgaria has not been broken from the Peace of S. Stefano to the present day.

As time advances the peoples will not stand war

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at any price, however ardently the monarchs, those eternal disturbers of the peace of the world, may desire it, however strenuously the press, that remorseless arouser of popular passion, may labour for it.

And the historic battlefields of Europe shall fall into grateful desuetude.

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EPILOGUE

ATONEMENT

Being a tragedy enacted at Rustchuk on the four days 3rd to 6th March 1887.

"And on the glittering limit far withdrawn
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."
TENNYSON.

ACT I

"Suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping."
POE.

THE scene is the unpretending official residence of the commandant of Rustchuk, the time just before midnight on the 2nd March 1887, exactly a year after the conclusion of the peace between Servia and Bulgaria, and six months after the infamous abduction of Prince Alexander by traitors and Russian agents.

The night is black, the sky overspread with snow-pregnant clouds; there is frost in the air and ice on the gutters. The streets are utterly deserted. Most of the windows of the commandant's house are

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dark and shuttered; no light within can be seen from without except the feeble glimmer of a night lamp behind a red blind on the upper floor.

In its gleam a young woman, pale and worn by anxiety, sits upright in her bed, listening with strained attention to every sound, and praying God to guide the beloved husband in the darksome plans which have been kept secret even from her, the trusted wife, that no cloud may obscure the bright sunshine of their married life and the future of the curly darling who sleeps peacefully in the cot by her side.

In the room below a man waits and watches, behind windows doubly barred and carefully curtained, hearkening to every stray noise of the night, to the solitary footstep, with its metallic ring on the frozen ground, of a belated wayfarer, to the distant bark of a roused watchdog, to such chance sounds as carry far in the dead stillness of midnight.

The watcher is a man of close on forty, dressed in the tunic of the Bulgarian infantry officer. A strange contrast to the embroidered slippers on his feet is afforded by the Grand Cross of the Order of Bulgaria which gleams proudly on his breast. He has a sallow complexion, features not uncomely, but haggard and anxious, a sparse short beard, scanty dark hair, and cold steel-gray eyes, which combine

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with the unmistakable look of the habitual leader of men the unpleasantly wistful expression of one who is playing a dangerous and secret game. He is smart of garb, moderately tall, well formed and sinewy, and of soldierly bearing.

This is Major Usunoff, commandant of Rustchuk, famed throughout the land, celebrated in patriotic song, glorified in national lay, as the Defender of Widdin, the darling of the people, the favourite of the soldiery, the trusted adviser and helper of the Regency in Sofia,[60] whom to see, when he takes his walks abroad, parents lift their delighted children high, who is acclaimed by a tumultuous populace in whichever township or hamlet he may enter.

The church clock strikes midnight in a deep-toned, muffled clang. There is a soft knock at the street door. Usunoff opens it stealthily, and ushers in a man wrapped in the greatcoat of the Bulgarian officer. Presently there is another gentle knock, and yet another and another, and before the day is ten minutes old fifteen grave men, only two of whom wear civilian garb, sit in expectant silence around the hospitable glow of the grate. Very remarkable, they all wear slippers, felt shoes, goloshes, anything but the regulation boots of the service.

The negotiations are brief. They consist of a short communication by Usunoff, to the effect that Bollmann, a Russian officer passing as a civilian,

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has arrived at Giurgevo with important messages and documents, and that this day, the 3rd March, is chosen for the rising which is to do away with the anti-Muscovite Regency at the bidding of Russia. A few questions and replies follow, and some brief instructions committed hastily to paper in cypher. The conspirators leave as noiselessly as they have come, with the whispered farewell: "*Au revoir*, at eight in the morning in front of the engineers' barracks."

Some time after they are gone, Usunoff masters his feverish anxiety sufficiently to join the young wife, who, from the landing above, has repeatedly called him by many an endearing name.

ACT II

"He that would grasp the crowns of this fair earth
Must stake his all, and be prepared to lose it."

KÖRNER.

The scene changes from the secrecy of a conspirator's chamber to the publicity of a great square; midnight blackness has made way for noonday glare. The 3rd March 1887 is a bright, frosty winter day, with ground hard as iron, and blocks of ice floating seaward on the torrent of the swollen Danube.

The same deep and sonorous voice which has

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so often cheered and roused the defenders of Widdin, making itself heard above the turmoil of battle, has incited two battalions of engineers, some 600 men, to revolt against the constituted authorities. But all efforts to inveigle also the battalion of infantry stationed in Rustchuk and the urban gendarmes into rebellion have failed, and, to make matters worse for the conspirators, the populace has unexpectedly taken the part of the Government, hundreds of citizens having been armed by the loyal officers.

The engineers' barracks serve as headquarters to the rebels, who have captured the telegraph-office, but have failed in their attempt upon the station, so that the railway wire has flashed the news of the rising abroad.

From a bold offensive the rebels have changed reluctantly to a strict defensive, and all they can do now is to hold their own. The street fights have been bitter and merciless. Doors and walls are riddled by bullets, windows are broken, and nearly a hundred persons have been killed or wounded, among them many peaceful citizens and several women and children. The death of a young lady, held to be the handsomest girl in town, has excited the unbounded fury of the rabble. The entire populace is in a state of the wildest frenzy. Consternation, rage, indignance,

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exultation, and despair have fanned the flame of public passion to red-hot intensity.

The loyal soldiers, supported by the gendarmes and the armed citizens, are preparing an attack upon the engineers' barracks, and have assembled for that purpose in the square. There is a continual exchange of rifle fire, and suddenly through the thick of it there stalks a tall figure clad in a foreign uniform, stalks as only a Prussian officer can do. It is Major von Loeper, the German Consul, who has donned his gala-dress to offer his services as mediator. He is *en grande tenue*, and his appearance is faultless. He wears the blue uniform of his regiment, the Foot-guards, with clanking sword, white gloves, waving plumes, the Iron Cross and the star of the Black Eagle on his breast. His moustache is waxed and turned upwards martially; he eyes the levelled rifles with contempt, and struts in proud disregard of whizzing bullets, as well he may, for he has stood unharmed in the fiery tempest of Gravelotte. Behind him marches his grave kavass, a tawny, lustrous-eyed Tartar, with loaded carbine and well-ironed fez; he, too, walks with the unconcern of a Sunday afternoon promenader, since ten years before he has gone scatheless through the bloody ordeal of the Lom campaign.

The loyal troops accept the Consul's proffered

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mediation, and he stalks away in the direction of the rebels' barracks. All he can obtain from Usunoff, as yet undaunted, is a cessation of hostilities for one hour. But the respite lapses, and the negotiations have remained futile. The firing is renewed, and Major von Loeper returns in state to the consulate, nothing diminished in dignity, albeit unsuccessful.

In the privacy of her bedroom a young mother is on her knees, with streaming eyes and uplifted hands, and a child listens, delighted and spellbound, to the pretty clatter outside, like that of falling chains, imploring permission to go to the proscribed window, to see why the folk are so lustily shouting and screaming in the street below.

ACT III

"Nor ear can hear nor tongue can tell
The tortures of that inward hell."
BYRON.

A few hours have passed in the red and white heats of unbridled passions. It is late in the afternoon, and the western sky is painted chrome and yellow. The scene is the high Danube bank just below Rustchuk, whence thousands upon thousands of spectators are watching a drama enacted below on the ice-bearing waves of the tumultuous river.

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The revolt has failed. One by one the rebels have lost the positions acquired at the cost of innocent blood. The engineers are confined to, and besieged in, their barracks, and negotiations for their surrender are in progress. From Tirnova a battalion of loyal infantry is coming by road, and 200 armed citizens of Rasgrad are preparing to embark in the train requisitioned for them.

Usunoff and his fellow-leaders have escaped. From a disused wharf or storehouse they have rowed across to the low island between which and Rustchuk there is a narrow channel of sluggish water, a sort of bye-path of navigation, whilst the broad highway of the Danube flows between the island and Roumanian Giurgevo in an agitated, ice-studded current. Sympathisers in the latter town are sending the tug which has been kept ready, steam up, for such an emergency.

Curses and execrations are levelled against the little mud-bank, the last refuge of twelve strong and determined, now doomed men. But the cries of rage give way to a great shout of triumph as from below stream there is seen to approach the good ship misnamed *Golubtchik*, the *Little Dove*, a fine, new, Clyde-built gunboat, which, moored at Rustchuk in the morning, has been moved by her temporary commander, a midshipman of eighteen summers, so as not to expose the sailors, gunners,

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and marines to temptation and the contagion of revolt.

There she comes, slowly but surely making her way against the rapid, mud-brown stream, her sharp iron nose crushing boldly through the floating ice, her funnels issuing black clouds like the breath of a monster in labour. The youthful captain is on the bridge, grasping the lever of the indicator with one hand, and a field-glass with the other. The guns are charged and trained; the marines are at their stations with loaded rifles.

A signal goes up on the mast of the hill-top Observatory, a relic of the Ottoman *régime*, and the pole of the *Little Dove* responds with fluttering, many-coloured pennants. A blank shot is discharged from the bow chaser, with a brief scintillation, a grayish cloud, a tardy, deep-toned crash. A white flag rises precipitately on the stumpy mast of the Giurgevo craft. A second shot is discharged by the *Golubtchik*, and this time a shell, describing a graceful curve, strikes a floe, and exploding, sends sparkling splinters high up into the air. Bulgaria has manifested that in a matter of civil strife she can acknowledge no foreign flag of truce, knowing full well that it is treachery thinly veiled. The Roumanian tug wheels round, and steams an inglorious retreat to neutral safety.

The suspense of the spectators is strained almost

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to breaking-point when the men on the mud-bank take again to their frail craft. But in face of a huge ice-block approaching in their passage they turn back; there seems to be a violent commotion among them as they land again. Meanwhile two boats have put off from the *Little Dove*, which, with the bustle on her crowded decks, presents a most undovelike appearance. Each boat is propelled by eight oars, moved by brawny and willing arms, and each holds a score or so of levelled rifles.

A tremendous shout goes up into the darkening heavens as the rebels are seen to wave their handkerchiefs in token of submission.

Ten minutes later twelve bound men in torn and bespattered uniforms, several of them wounded, one —their chief—so badly that he has to be carried, are with difficulty saved by their stalwart custodians from the fury of a howling rabble.

In town a house is in the hands of the soldiers. They are everywhere, in the sitting-rooms, the library, the great public reception room, even on the stairs and in the bedchambers, in the kitchen and the wine-cellar. They are investigating every drawer and cupboard, and have made merry over a bundle of letters which he, the absent and disgraced master, has kept in a secret recess of his writing-table, letters containing a girl's fervent vows.

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That girl, now a mother, is rendered frantic in the room above by a child's innocent inquiry "why papa tarries so long."

ACT IV

"We were not made to torture thus each other."
BYRON.

It is noon on the next day, the 4th March. The scene is the court-house of Rustchuk. The great hall is packed from floor to ceiling, for by command of the Regency the widest publicity is to be given to the trial. A huge crowd is assembled outside. There are long files of soldiers, and strong bodies of sturdy citizens proudly parading their Krnka rifles.

On the judges' bench sit three officers, men of untarnished reputation and distinguished past. The names of sixteen defendants are called out, but only fifteen are brought in; one lies wounded to death in an ambulance improvised in a chemist's shop. Of the fifteen several are bandaged, and have to be assisted; one, their leader, Major Usunoff, commandant of Rustchuk, "late commandant of Widdin," lies prone on a couch, with bullets in shoulder and leg. By his side, holding his hand, is a young woman, disorderly of attire, dishevelled, and deadly pale; they whisper to each other as if the horrible

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paraphernalia of judgment and damnation were of no concern to them.

Of the sixteen defendants, one (Bollmann) is a Russian officer; two are civilians—a solicitor of Rustchuk, and a trader with a double residence at Rustchuk and Giurgevo; one is a former Bulgarian officer, retired on account of Slivnitza wounds; the other twelve are officers of the Bulgarian army in active service.[61]

The prisoners are asked whether they wish to make statements, and Bollmann jumps up precipitately. In a high-pitched, whining voice he claims his right as a Russian subject to be handed over to the German Consul, who represents also Russian interests in the town. Then Usunoff, the chosen spokesman of the rest, raises himself painfully on his couch, supported by the wife's arm. In his deep-toned voice, which bears no trace of physical suffering, he speaks thus:—

"The defendants executed my orders. They must be held exempt from responsibility. I intended, not to throw over the Regency, but to protest against unjust laws, which threaten the liberty of Bulgaria's citizens. I never dreamt to stain with blood the streets of Rustchuk. I implored the troops opposed to me to lay down their arms, in vain. I implored the citizens to make common cause with me, in vain. Those for whose sake I once more drew my sword

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attacked me with deadly weapons. We were compelled to defend our lives. Not one cartridge but what, on my side, was spent in self-defence. Before God, the guilt of the bloodshed rests not with me."

The last sentence he has shouted at the top of his voice. He sinks back exhausted, and the wife soothes his feverish brow with her scented lace handkerchief.

The examination of the witnesses occupies many weary hours of sickening suspense. The winter day has come to a close, and the lamps are lighted, which burn a dirty yellow in the vitiated atmosphere of the crowded chamber. The public accuser has his say, and a long and dreary say it is, piling fact upon fact and proof upon proof with dry and merciless and unanswerable sternness, and the one counsel allotted to the defendants, an officer in full regimentals, replies earnestly. It is nearly midnight when he has finished his passionate peroration, and the sitting is adjourned for a few hours.

Through the unwashed windows steals a gray dawn, before which the flickering light of ill-trimmed lamps pales visibly. The Court is reassembled, and the verdict is announced. Guilty against all defendants and on all counts, with extenuating circumstances against none, and aggravating against Usunoff and eight others. The wife utters a groan like one under torture; and the defending counsel makes a

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last and impassioned appeal for mercy. But mercy is a quality unknown in Bulgaria on that day.

Sentence. That Bollmann be handed over to the custody of the German Consul. Penal servitude for life against six: the lawyer, the trader, the retired officer, the wounded man, who is at that moment groaning his last in the chemist's back-parlour, and two others. Death to Usunoff and eight comrades in guilt.

With a wild cry, that seems to come out of some unfathomable depth rather than from the throat, the wife throws herself over the doomed man; her arms are around his neck, and her lips are on his. She is removed by force; the prisoners are roughly bundled out; the German Consul takes charge of his *protégé* with unconcealed disgust; the judges yawn and stretch themselves; the court clears quickly, and all is over.

Outside, the people assembled in their thousands send shout upon shout of triumph to greet the coming morn of revenge, so that the crazy hovels of Rustchuk lanes shake in their palsied shoes. The rest of the day, and the night, too, is devoted to street-dances, orgies, bouts, and frantic popular enjoyment.

But a lassie of nine summers, with brown curls and wistful eyes, watches for the home-coming of the father who shall never return.

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ACT V

"Pass not thou my grave
Without one thought whose relics there recline."
BYRON.

The last scene. The turmoil of crowded streets makes way for the dead silence of a lonely hill-top. It is the Sari Bair, or Yellow Hill, a mile or so south of Rustchuk, the particular spot being the cross-roads on its summit where the track from Tchervenavoda joins the great highway that connects Rustchuk and Rasgrad. The time is an hour before sunrise on Sunday the 6th March, that hour when night is blackest and readiest for the conception of another dawn.

A detachment of soldiers work silently with spades by the light of torches. They dig nine oblong, parallel holes, separated by intervals of two feet width. Those soldiers are engineers,[62] and they dig the graves of the men who have seduced them to high treason. They wear no arms, but infantry men look on with loaded rifles. Save a few brief and peremptory instructions not a word is spoken. So uncanny and gruesome is the scene that even the grim sergeant-major in charge of the detachment shudders, and is visibly relieved when a cursory inspection permits him to pronounce the work as finished.

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All depart save one man as sentry, who, placing the lantern on the ground and hugging his rifle as if it were his best friend, walks frantically to and fro, trying to dispel the unnerving gloom of his surroundings by thinking of this and that, of anything but those awful empty graves, and yet always returning to them with eyes and mind, until he, a brave and stalwart soldier of many a fight, shakes like the veriest coward, and sees ghastly phantoms in the creatures of a heated fancy that people the black night. Above, the stars sparkle, cold and clear, like Rhine wine in a green glass.

It grows less dark, and presently there is in the east a little patch of rose-tinged gray, into which the mighty river seems to flow. The stars grow faint and fainter, only the brightest struggle bravely with the coming day.

At last there is relief for the lonely watcher. The steady tramp of trained men approaches on the highroad, and the eastern sky blushes deeply. It is a detachment of infantry, with a lieutenant, a corporal, and a surgeon. The graves are now visible in the growing light as long black holes gaping for their victims. The grinding of wheels and the clatter of trotting horses are heard; and just as the day has fairly set in, four two-horse carriages, a squadron of cavalry, and some mounted officers of

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high degree arrive on the scene. From three of the vehicles there are brought forth nine men, eight of whom have their hands tied behind them, the ninth being apparently badly hurt and hardly able to keep upright. They wear privates' tunics, for their sentence includes degradation. The fourth carriage contains the prefect of the town, his clerk, a lawyer, and a priest.

The prisoners have the day before appealed to the three consuls accredited in Rustchuk, those of Germany, Italy, and Roumania; but all that these willing gentlemen could obtain from a stern and resolute Government is a delay of twenty-four hours. The town is unaware of the impending consummation of the Court's decree, and lies in the thralls of its Sunday morning slumber.[68]

The prisoners are unbound, and accorded permission to write a few lines to the loved ones. With the exception of two they are married men; one was wed but a week ago by the very priest who now performs his solemn rites. The bent backs of soldiers serve as desks, and the prefect takes charge of the sad epistles.

They are arranged in a line. The priest presents to each the crucifix, which all kiss.

The rising sun gilds the tops of Rustchuk's domes and minarets, and the Danube glistens like a band of burnished steel. Many miles of wintry

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scenery are visible, enhanced by the solemn stillness of a Sabbath morn. There is peace, perfect peace in the flaming eastern sky and the deep purple of the west, where night still lingers; in the sleeping town, in the majestic river, in hill and dale and meadow, even in the winding line of the deserted highroad, traceable to the confines of the horizon—everywhere except here, on the hill-top, where men are cruelly avenging a cruel wrong.

Usunoff says, in a loud voice, "Behold what a lovely spot they have chosen for our graves—the cross-roads, where all the folk will see them, and will wonder!"

These are his last words. A few minutes later the doctor can but state that the ready corporal's *coup de grace* is needed in no case.

The graves are filled, the ground is levelled, and withered branches mark the supreme atonement of nine brave men who have listened to the lures of the temptress. The soldiers, the officials, the horses, and riders, and carriages, return to town, and the spot is deserted before the bells of Rustchuk have commenced their Sabbath ringing. But on the frozen ground there lingers a long, straight line of dark stains.

Meanwhile, in a strange room in town, a woman sleeps heavily under the influence of a drug administered by kindly hands, and beside her a

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child, whose blissful ignorance needs no drug, smiles at her dreams.

Noon is past, and leisurely after-dinner walkers —men, women, and children—proceed to the cross-roads in their hundreds. With awe and wonder they behold the withered branches and the patches of congealed purple fluid on the ground, now in charge of grim sentinels; and many a secret prayer is uttered when the late commandant's kindness is remembered.

Bulgaria has judged. She has not hesitated to sacrifice the best of her sons to atone for a gigantic blunder fraught with fifty-fold murder and a hundred mutilations. May the sacrifice not have been made in vain—that is not only a hope, but also a warning, particularly appropriate as I pen the two words which have severed so many bonds, which now cut the tie betwixt the reader and myself, the words—*the end.*

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APPENDICES

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I

NOTES

1. The Roman castle Storgosia was in existence at the beginning of the present century, and was actually habitable; on its site and with its stones the konak (Governor's official residence) of Plevna was built, about 1830.

2. Attila must have passed Bononia about 446, but there is reason to believe that he did not conquer it.

3. The river is called in Slav Bolga, in Arabic بولغا Bulgha. The Bulgarians call themselves B'lgar, pronounced almost as a monosyllable.

4. After 395 the name Dacia was transferred to the countries south of the Danube.

5. The hamlet Eski Stamboul, 12 miles south-west of Shumla, stands on the ruins of Preslav, and the latter had been erected on those of Marcianopolis, built by Trajan. Thus a Roman stronghold rose to the dignity of a czar's city, and degenerated into a dirty Turkish village.

6. "Rayah" is a term of reproach applied by the Osmanlis to unbelievers, more particularly to the Christian subjects of the Porte.

7. The Fanariots were the Christian Greeks of Stamboul, who, originally slaves, had risen to enormous power in the Serai. The hospodars, or vice-regents of Moldavia and Wallachia, were always chosen from among them. During the Greek war of liberation in the Twenties they lost their power, much to the advantage of the Ottoman Empire.

8. I confess ignorance of the correct English orthography of this name. My spelling "Tsintsar" is phonetic. The name is said to

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be derived from the people's peculiar pronunciation (*Tsints*) of the Slav word *chinch* (five), and their inability to form the sound *ch*.

9. The Spanioles were the Jews proper of Turkey, and had their headquarters in Sofia, where they formed a wealthy and important community.

10. In my description of the fortifications I have purposely avoided technicalities, and have abstained from using such terms as are intelligible only to military men. A few more particulars are given in my *Defence of Plevna*, pp. 100, 101.

11. I embodied my experience of, and views on this dialect in a short essay, and sent the MS. to two or three of our principal magazines, but was informed that the subject presented no interest to the English reader. Suffice it to say here that—although its existence has been disputed and ridiculed by certain German stay-at-home *savants*—the dialect did undoubtedly exist in 1877 in Western Bulgaria, and was to my thinking the nearest approach of any modern tongue to classical Latin.

12. Those of my readers who desire to know something about the Turkish Danube monitors, now things of the past, are referred to pp. 96 and 97 of my *Defence of Plevna*.

13. These Troglodytes were first discovered by the English traveller Edward Brown in 1670, who commemorated the event in his work, *A Brief Account of Some Travels* (London, 1673), by the following doggerel :—

> "Now I believe the Troglodytes of old,
> Whereof Herodotus and Strabo told,
> Since everywhere about these parts, in holes
> Circular, men I find and human moles."

They were in existence as recently as 1886; since then they are said to have disappeared. In 1877 the colony was estimated at 400 souls.

14. During the spring and summer of 1877, a good many unofficial raids were made by the Turkish soldiers on the hostile banks between Calafat and Chetaté. One of these will form the subject of a later chapter. My comrades often commented on the loneliness of the country, which contrasted forcibly with the plurality of hamlets and homesteads in the Widdin sanjak. Had they been exploring—so they said—the desolate wilderness of an uninhabited South Sea island, the country could not have been more forsaken. Except cattle and poultry, running wild among rank vegetation, the petticoat which heads Chapter XVII. was the only token of human existence

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ever brought home as spoil. The most powerful glasses failed to reveal a single habitation, besides the two places named, marking the southern and northern limits of the zone of raids and impunity, and you had to tramp miles before striking path or track. The reader is requested to bear in mind the absence of direct communication between Calafat and Chetaté.

15. In the battle of Nissib the Lieutenant-Colonel Omar Bey fought under the eyes of Moltke, who saw the forces organised by him routed in the most distressing manner.

16. According to the German historian Geffcken, General Dannenberg was the Russian commander in the battle of Oltenitza. The various historians differ so much in their narrations of this action that their accounts read as if they referred to different battles. In a later note I shall allude again to the astonishing discrepancies in the French, German, and English records of this campaign.

17. Kinglake calls this general persistently Aurep. Anrep is the orthography of Kanitz, Geffcken, and others.

18. For purposes of comparison I append the account given by Rousset in *Guerre de Crimée* (vol. i. pp. 62, 63) :—

"Après avoir fait reconnaître et tâter (*sic*) l'ennemi le 31 Décembre 1853 (*sic*), Omer, dans la matinée du 6 Janvier 1854, mit en mouvement deux colonnes, l'une par un chemin (*sic*) qui longeait le Danube, l'autre sur le fleuve même, dans des barques halées en remonte ; les deux ensemble, avec une artillerie égale à celle des Russes, leur étaient supérieures en force. Elles attaquèrent, et malgré la resistance énergique de l'ennemi, ayant l'avantage du nombre, elles le repoussèrent de poste en poste au delà de Tchétaté ; mais des renforts lui arrivant de Kraïova (*sic*—50 miles !) les Turcs se replièrent d'abord en deça du village, puis, tandis que la colonne venue par le fleuve repassait directement sur la rive bulgare, l'autre reprenait, sans être inquiétée, le chemin de Kalafat. Comme elle avait été obligée de laisser derrière elle deux pièces demontées . . ." and so forth. Again : "Quatre jours de suite Omer renouvela ses attaques sans qu'il n'y eût de part ni d'autre de succès absolument décisif."

It will be noticed that the French historian's account differs essentially from mine. Putting aside the minor questions of the date of the Russian occupation, the road by the river (which did not exist, there being only the *détour via* Golentzé), and the captured guns, there is this important discrepancy: he maintains that the Turks were, later on the same day, driven out of conquered Chetaté.

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But I have it on the authority of at least a hundred Widdin citizens —eye-witnesses for all intents and purposes—that the Turks occupied and held the village until the closing semicircle of the Russian investment rendered it impossible for them to include the place in their lines of defence without greatly increasing the already too extended radius of the Calafat position—which means that they had undisputed possession of the village for at least a month.

In the main my account agrees with that given by Kanitz (*Donau Bulgarien*, vol. i. p. 253), and no more painstaking and trustworthy traveller, collector, and recorder than the plodding German, slow but sure, ever put pen to patient paper. Moreover, he cannot be accused of partiality for the Turks, his inclinations tending all the other way, and is certain not to record anything in favour of the latter unless circumstances and his own conviction compelled him to do so. Like myself, he collected his information orally and locally, and he had the additional advantage of writing in 1864, that is, only ten years after the event, and of being able to cross over to Calafat and pursue his investigations there. In places where local history is not written (there was not a newspaper in the pashalik in 1854) the student is dependent on tradition, which is, perhaps, a slightly more reliable source than many people may suppose.

19. I copied the English part of the inscription in my note-book, but not the Turkish; respecting the latter I am, therefore, speaking from memory. As the Koran has not been translated into Turkish, but is invariably used and cited in the Arabic language, the sentence cannot have been a quotation from sacred writing.

20. If the reader would like an hour's amusement, let him peruse and compare, for example, Kinglake, vol. ii. pp. 39-45; Rüstow (Zurich), vol. i. pp. 22-43; Rousset, vol. i. pp. 69-100; and Kanitz, vol. i. p. 253. They are all good authors, and yet they flatly contradict each other, not only in their estimates of Omar and their judgments on his actions and conduct, but also in the dry accounts of bare facts. Not two of the four narratives are even faintly alike.

21. In the battle of Eupatoria there fought, and received his fire-baptism, the eighteen year old second-lieutenant of cavalry, Osman Nuri Effendi, afterwards Osman Pasha.

22. The Bulgarian popes were distinguished in 1877 by superstition, hypocrisy, and an almost incredible ignorance. They were the most contemptible set of divines I have ever met with. Even in matters appertaining to their own calling their ignorance

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was astounding. They had certain old-established superstitions and learned certain formulas by rote; those were their qualifications for spiritual administration. Of sacred history, of even the most fundamental Christian teaching, they knew nothing. These deficiencies may be counterbalanced in some measure by zeal and sincerity, as they sometimes are, for instance, among some of our own dissenters; but of these redeeming qualities the Bulgarian popes were totally innocent.

23. The Druses are a warlike tribe of the Lebanon, and were in 1861 practically independent. Those who have laid the guilt of the Syrian massacres at the door of Islam I wish to remind that the Druses are not Mohammedans, but confess to a creed—a nearer kin to Christianity than to Islam—established by Hakim, Sultan of Egypt, who reigned from 996 to 1020, and elaborated after his death by a Moslem renegade and impostor, by name Mohammed, who, to serve his private ends, gave it out that Hakim was Issa (Jesus) reborn—a theory which the Druses have ever since implicitly believed in. Like the Kurds, the Druses have always been the sworn and rabid enemies of Turkey, and are, generally, more friendly towards Christians than towards Moslems.

24. Such personifications were at one time very common in Turkey. I was told on trustworthy authority that Hussein, when he was Pasha of Widdin, actually commissioned a man to represent him to the curiosity-stricken travellers who were anxious to interview the blood-stained exterminator of the janissaries, then a personality of European fame. Moltke, of course, saw the right man; but there can be no doubt that nine out of ten Frankish tourists were received by the spurious counterfeit. A curious case of impersonation occurred within my own experience in 1877. A young Bulgar of Widdin had been accused of an atrocious murder and acquitted for want of evidence. He left the town hurriedly and clandestinely, but another young man usurped his place, with the consent of the family and the connivance of the whole community, received the good country folk who were anxious to behold the hero of so sensational an occurrence, and collected money to help defray the expenses of his defence.

25. Aziz Pasha was a scion of the famous old family of Bulgar grandees Sokolski, the "Falcons." Another branch of this family—also Pomakes—dwelt in 1877 in a fine chiftlik (farm), just outside Plevna, and from them I received much friendship and hospitality. The Plevna Sokolskis were very proud of their kinsman (then

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Governor of Philippopolis), who was at that time a well-known character in the Peninsula.

26. I have given some particulars of Midhat's career in my *Defence of Plevna*, in note 31, p. 446, which is too long for reproduction. What a pity and a shame it is that the Sultan listened to such men as the notorious Austrian baron of Turkish railway-concession fame, whose name need hardly be mentioned, and to that scandalous rogue Mahmoud Damad Pasha (see the Plevna book, note 12, p. 442), whilst he not only turned a deaf ear to, but actually bound and gagged an honest and purposeful statesman like Midhat. The latter's downfall had its origin in an incident not generally known: he attempted to arrest two notorious Bulgarian rebels and agitators, who had taken refuge on a Danube steamer flying the Austrian flag, off Lom Palankah, and in the scuffle with the gendarmes the two suspects were shot. The Stamboul serai greedily seized this pretext for consummating the long-plotted recall and degradation of Midhat. England was on particularly friendly terms with the latter, and on more than one occasion she has interceded on his behalf.

27. Haji is a courtesy-title given to men who have made the Haj, that is, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

28. For an example of this style of writing I commend Trotha's *Kampf um Plewna*. I seize this opportunity for thanking the author of that fine work for the assistance it has afforded me in compiling my volume on the same subject.

29. I presume this to be a corruption of Stanley, since the Turks, like the Spaniards, cannot pronounce an initial "St" or "Sk," and affix a short "E" or "I," for instance, Istambouli, Eskodra (Skutari).

30. Details of Osman Pasha's progress:—Second Lieutenant 1854, First Lieutenant 1856, Captain 1860, Major's Adjutant 1866, Major 1866, Lieutenant-Colonel 1867, Colonel 1871, General of Brigade 1874, General of Division 1875, Marshal 1876, Ghazi 1877. Details of his service:—Crimean War 1854 to 1856, Syrian rebellion 1860, Crete rebellion 1866 and 1867, Yemen campaign (Arabia) 1871 and 1872, Servian War 1876, Russian War 1877, Minister of War 1879, Marshal of the Palace 1881.

31. Unfortunately these officers were the scum of the Czar's army. I could a little tale unfold of their incredible corruption, of their incapacity, of their habits of debauchery and drunkenness.

32. I have devoted more space to this war than its importance warrants or my subject calls for, since its history has still to be

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written. With the exception of Lieutenant Salusbury's volume, which is but a personal record of adventure, I know of no work dealing with this topic. In the case of the much-described Russo-Turkish War, I shall confine myself to my subject proper, *i.e.* Widdin.

33. Doctor Ryan, in a letter recently received, says: "None but field-officers were invited, but we had to pay a lira per ticket." (The pasha must have had strange notions of hospitality!) "We sent to Crayova for our supper. I was curious to know where our partners were to come from, and was amazed to find so many handsome girls present, chiefly Grecians, Bulgarians, Roumanians, Spanish and Polish Jewesses; and you know how pretty some of the latter were. Your Doris was among them." Those who are curious to know who Doris was, are referred to my *Defence of Plevna*, chapter iv., which gives also a detailed description of the Widdin camps and the life therein.

34. I beg leave to quote Dr. Ryan: "I was lunching with Colonel Stracy at the hotel kept by a Polish Jew, whose name I have forgotten, on the banks of the river, when without warning the guns began to fire. The excitement and the scene which followed are well portrayed in your book." The Doctor refers to pp. 106-109 of the *Defence of Plevna*. Much of what I have said in that volume belongs also to the present work; but I am loath to repeat myself, and can but refer the indulgent reader to chapter iv. of the book quoted.

35. Mr Archibald Forbes has assured me that he possesses proof positive that Sistova fell through treachery, and that Abdul Kerim Pasha was the man who sold his country. He made a stipulation that, for the sake of appearances, a certain number of men should come to grief during the crossing of the Danube, which condition was carried out literally. A more callous and horrible sale of human life can hardly be imagined; yet the case is by no means isolated in modern history. It is another of the many and awful penalties of war that it breeds corruption prolifically.

36. Although I have no information on this point, I think that it was from historic Chetaté whence this boat sailed. The rest of the Roumanian shore, from Chetaté in the north to Calafat in the south, was one rank, uninhabited wilderness.

37. I refer, of course, to the Black and White Lom in Eastern Bulgaria, not to the river of the same name in the pashalik Widdin.

38. The telegraph line to Negotin (for Belgrad) had been destroyed during the war of 1876, and had never been restored.

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39. Rahova (the Variana of the Romans), prettily situate on the high banks of the Danube, was at that time a town of about 4000 inhabitants (four-fifths of whom were Bulgarian Christians) and constituted the capital of the sanjak of the same name. Among the remaining fifth there were many Roumanian settlers. The town had been a station of the Danube steamers, and a well-known crossing-place to Piket, by means of a steam-ferry. It lay on the Plevna-Widdin highroad, had some industry, and was not wholly devoid of Western culture and comforts. The five battalions occupying it were composed of two of the original garrison (the third had joined Osman on his march to Plevna), and the three originally stationed at Beshti, which town they had abandoned anent the Roumanian bridge-building at Corabia (27th August), to prevent which neither they nor the Danube monitors had fired a shot. On September 25th Krylow with his powerful cavalry appeared before Rahova, but retreated hastily on being received with shells, reporting at headquarters that "he did not like to do damage to the town, since it contained so many Christians." In Piket, on the left Danube bank, there were a battery of six pieces and a battalion of Roumanian militia, which participated in the fighting of November 21st. Since the seizure of Rahova forms part of my narrative, I beg leave to quote the *Defence of Plevna*, pp. 324 and 325:—"On the 21st the Roumanians began to shell, and the Turks responded. After an artillery duel of some hours' duration, in which the antiquated ordnance of the Turks had no chance against the fine Krupp guns of the enemy, and which cost the former 400 killed and wounded, the garrison evacuated the place by a path leading along the river—the Lom Palankah road being held by the Roumanians—taking baggage-train, wounded, and some of the guns with them. This path was occupied by a Roumanian battalion, which was surprised and dispersed. The enemy's artillery shelled the retiring column, and the cavalry started in pursuit, so that the Turks had to abandon the heavier vehicles and some of the guns; the latter were pushed into the river. The troops themselves, with the lighter carts, most of the wounded, and three guns, crossed the Skit and the Ogust close to their mouths by means of bridges built with submerged carts, and retreated unmolested to Lom Palankah. Twenty carts with 100 wounded, and one containing the archives of Rahova, fell into the hands of the Roumanians. The Turks lost, altogether, 500 men, killed, wounded, and captured; 1500 men escaped; the Roumanians had 300 killed and wounded. The abandon-

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ment of Rahova was unavoidable, the place being not provisioned, insufficiently armed and manned, and untenable because isolated; the retreat was effected in a skilful and competent manner. The Roumanians made a ridiculous fuss over what they called grandiloquently the 'storming of Rahova,' whereas, in truth, the undertaking was badly planned and badly executed, full of blunders from beginning to end. For allowing the garrison to escape the Roumanian colonel was severely censured and deprived of his command." It is amusing to read, in the light of later investigations, the contemporary reports of this ridiculous affair!

40. The Servians appear to have had a corps grandiloquently styled the Timok army, and destined to operate against Widdin; but it is certain that it never even crossed the frontier to co-operate with the Roumanians.

41. This officer, as a colonel, had participated in the Plevna battle of the 10th December, and for him his compatriots had foolishly claimed the title "Conqueror of Plevna," because, forsooth, he had happened to be the first person of rank to pay his respects to the wounded and captive Osman Pasha! For this exploit he was promoted.

42. The other two divisions had pursued the Rahova-Lom Palankah river road.

43. The designations, "first," "second," "third," divisions, are my own, introduced for the sake of clearness and brevity.

44. Previous to an attack the Russians before Plevna had always undertaken a violent shelling for some hours, followed by silence of a like duration. The purpose of this plan was to mislead the enemy, which, as a matter of fact, and speaking from personal experience, it never did.

45. This is the only instance which I know of that alcoholic liquor was dealt out to Turkish soldiers, who are total abstainers by religious precept. In Plevna, even during the severest weather, spirits were neither given nor asked for.

46. The Russians made it a practice, during the Plevna campaign, to exclude totally in every enumeration of forces or estimate of strength the Roumanian army of 42 battalions, 32 squadrons, and 120 guns, or 30,000 men, as if this fine body of men had no existence. Insult to a confederate can hardly be more grievous, or the cruelty of contempt more refined. The Russian participator in these events, General Kuropatkin, mentions, in his historical work, the strained relations between the allies, and reads his countrymen a

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sensible and pertinent lecture on the vices of haughtiness, conceit, and ingratitude.

47. The term, "Der alte Weiber Kaffeeklatsch," employed by the *Hamburger Nachrichten*, Prince Bismarck's journal, is, like most expressive and appropriate terms, well-nigh untranslatable.

48. I am told that the Bulgarian Government committed the unpardonable vandalism of destroying Pasvan Oglu's grave.

49. It is almost needless to remind the reader that Austria can mobilise a million men within a month or six weeks. The grand total to which Prince Alexander brought up his available forces after Pirot was about 100,000 men, including the Widdin detachment. This must be considered a fine performance for a third-rate and sparsely populated Principality, which had practically been established but two months ago, and for a space of time not exceeding three weeks, reckoning from the first rumour of Servian hostility to the consummation. Against this force Servia by herself—and only with the utmost exertion—could have placed no more than 45,000 men in the field, after the disasters of Slivnitza and Pirot, and the useless bloodshed in front of Widdin, and her stock of ammunition was nearly exhausted.

50. In the light of later events, notably of Milan's divorce and abdication, and of his subsequent undignified life (to use a mild term), it is impossible to understand the almost universal contemporary sympathy with Servia, and the violent ill-will of the European press toward Prince Alexander's person in particular, and the cause of Bulgaria in general. But the tone of the press after Slivnitza changed in many cases to one of respect and even fulsome admiration, and changed with astonishing and suspicious rapidity. Verily, journalism is played down low in these days!

51. In Bulgaria there is, and there was in 1885, general conscription, every male subject of the Principality, irrespective of creed or race, being liable to serve with the colours. This law, though carried out strictly with regard to the Bulgarians and their kindred, was ministered in a wilfully lax way as to the Turks, Greeks, and other hostile, semi-hostile, or doubtful subjects, so as to accustom them gently to the new state of things. (In the Ottoman Empire Christians are, and ever have been, totally exempt from military service.) In consequence, though there were a goodly number of Turks serving, and serving well, in the ranks of the Slivnitza army (many of whom received decorations from Prince Alexander), not a single Greek, Albanian, Armenian, or Pomake carried arms against

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Servia; and in the North, as we have seen, some 1200 to 1500 Turks, not liable or not called, formed the bulk of three battalions of volunteers. Attached to the Slivnitza army there were no less than nine battalions of Christian Macedonian volunteers, all Turkish subjects, who had crossed the frontier on purpose to help their kinsmen. Also in Panitza's "robber" brigade, Turks, Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Tsintsars were mixed indiscriminately.

52. These negotiations had no result; in fact, Alexander declined the Servian overtures with a haughtiness that Milan had invited by his consummate impudence. Leshjanin must have known of the hopeless condition of the Nishava army, of the desperate state of things in the southern theatre of war, and of the utter unlikelihood of those negotiations having any practical result. Probably, like Milan at that moment, he sought to gain time, otherwise his request for a cessation of hostilities is difficult to understand, since he had been victorious in the morning. It is, perhaps, needless to add that Usunoff had no news, and could not possibly have any, of the negotiations at headquarters.

53. I do not know which radius was given, say 10 miles, which is near enough for the purposes of this narrative, since it includes all the places of which the Servians had then possession, this being the object aimed at.

54. The third Plevna battle, 11th September 1877, is a striking proof of my assertion that bad weather, though of calamitous influence upon the offensive, is a powerful ally to the defensive.

55. It is this one decrepit redoubt which, during the Ottoman *régime*, had given the town the grandiloquent and undeserved name of Artzar Palankah.

56. There was at that time no direct telegraphic communication between Pirot and Widdin.

57. This state of things obtained throughout the Bulgarian forces, the reason being the withdrawal of the Russian officers after the Philippopolis rebellion. The chief of staff, Captain Petroff, was twenty-three years old, which is probably the record age, of any country or period. With the exception of three or four Germans and as many Turks, all the officers of the Bulgarian army were natives of the country.

58. The Franco-German War of 1870 and 1871 yielded also a daily average of 1400 casualties. The bloodiest war of modern times, that of America, 1863 to 1865, shows only an average of 800 a day.

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59. It was Panitza's "robbers" who stopped the sacking of Pirot, restored order among the Macedonian volunteers (the principal offenders), and prevented serious mischief. The brigade belied its nickname.

60. I am speaking of the Regency established after Prince Alexander's abdication (August 1886), and terminated by the election of Prince Ferdinand of Coburg-Kohary (July 1887). In the abduction of Alexander, in the Rustchuk, Silistria, Burgas, and other risings instigated by disappointed and remorseless Russia, scores of officers took part who had won distinction in the Servian War. I shall spare myself the sad task of penning and the reader that of perusing this inglorious list of fallen grandeur. Suffice it to say that the whole country was honeycombed by Russian corruption, the entire army attacked by the cancer of treachery. Rank, profession, fortune, past services—nothing was safe from exposure to vilest temptation.

61. The wounded man was Lieut.-Colonel Filoff, one of Prince Alexander's best helpers at Slivnitza and Pirot. The thirteen accused officers were all veterans of the Servian War. Among them was Major Panoff, commander of the Bulgarian artillery. A lieutenant of the same name had been killed by almost the first shot fired. Another rebel officer had been drowned in the Danube. The leader of the loyal troops had been Captain Vulkoff, commander of the infantry battalion stationed in Rustchuk, until in the afternoon Major Petroff, already mentioned in this volume, the chief-of-staff of the Bulgarian army, arrived by train from Rasgrad, and assumed the dictatorship. The name of the midshipman who acted with such circumspection and determination is Kesinoff. A German, Captain Mack, one of the principal heroes of Pirot, had arrived in Rustchuk on the 2nd March, and although cautiously sounded by Usunoff and Filoff, had taken the part of the Government.

62. The officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, of the two battalions of engineers were subsequently tried and sentenced to penal servitude, ranging from five to sixteen years. The 500 privates were pardoned

63. How high feeling ran in Bulgaria at that time against Russian intrigues and corruption is made manifest by the fact, that on Saturday the 5th March, a deputation of citizens waited upon Major Petroff, the temporary commandant of Rustchuk, imploring him to brook no interference with the due execution of the sentence. For after previous risings in other towns the rebels had, although sentenced, been pardoned, and, in some cases, allowed to escape.

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II

AUTHORITIES

FOR THE AUSTRO-TURKISH CAMPAIGN OF 1737 :—

Schmettau (Count), "Mémoires secrets de la guerre de Hongrie." Francfort, 1771.

FOR PASVAN OGLU'S REBELLION, 1797 to 1801 :—

F. Kanitz, "Donau Bulgarien." Leipzig, 1875 to 1879.

Also an unpublished letter, recently discovered among family papers, from a young German adventurer, who took part in the campaign on the Imperial side, to his mother.

Also tradition among the Turkish inhabitants of Widdin, such as the author found it in 1877.

FOR THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR OF 1828 AND 1829 :—

Moltke (Field-Marshal), "Der Russisch-Türkische Krieg." Berlin, 1845.

The *Oestreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* (Vienna) of the period.

FOR THE ORIENTAL AND CRIMEAN WARS, 1853 TO 1856 :—

F. W. Rüstow, "Der Krieg gegen Russland." Zurich, 1855 and 1856.

C. F. M. Rousset, "Histoire de la guerre de Crimée." Paris, 1878.

A. W. Kinglake, "Invasion of the Crimea." Edinburgh, 1877 to 1888.

F. H. Geffcken, "Zur Geschichte des Orientalischen Krieges." Berlin, 1881.

Also tradition in Widdin, particularly with respect to the battle of Chetaté, 6th January 1854.

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FOR EVENTS IN WIDDIN BETWEEN THE TRUCE WITH SERVIA (NOVEMBER 1876) AND THE DEPARTURE OF OSMAN PASHA'S ARMY (JULY 1877):—

Chiefly the author's own memoranda and recollections.

Also letters received from *Doctor Charles Ryan* of Melbourne, at that time an army surgeon in Widdin.

FOR THE ROUMANIAN SIEGE OF WIDDIN, DECEMBER 1877 TO FEBRUARY 1878:—

M. M. Fisch, "Co-opération de l'armée Roumaine en Bulgarie." Brussels, 1885.

Also three letters received by the author from a Turkish subaltern, who took part in the siege, and one received from a Jewish inhabitant of Widdin.

FOR THE SERVIAN ATTEMPT UPON WIDDIN IN NOVEMBER 1885:—

Hugo von Bilimek-Waissolm, "Der Bulgarisch-Serbische Krieg." Vienna, 1886.

A. von Huhn, "Der Kampf der Bulgaren." Leipzig, 1886.

Also a letter received from a Jewish inhabitant of Widdin.

FOR THE RUSTCHUK REBELLION OF MARCH 1887:—

"Elf Jahre Balkan." By an anonymous author. Breslau, 1889.

In addition to the works enumerated, the following volumes have also been with advantage consulted:—

A. von Huhn, "Aus Bulgarischer Sturmzeit." Leipzig, 1886

F. Kanitz, "Serbien." Leipzig, 1886.

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Droysen's (German) Historical Atlas.

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III

GLOSSARY OF TURKISH, BULGARIAN, AND OTHER TERMS EMPLOYED IN THIS VOLUME

Abdul, the servant of
Ada, island
Ak, white
Aziz, beloved

Bair, hill
Bazar, market, mart
Bey, lord; a title given to colonels
Bieli, white

Caraul, watch-house
Chiftlik, farm
Chingeni, gypsy

Damad, son-in-law
Demir, iron
Djumi Maritza, the Bulgarian National Anthem
Dragoman, interpreter

Effendi, gentleman, sir; a title given to majors, captains, and lower officials
Eski, old

Fanariot, Christian Greek of Stamboul
Ferik, general of division

Ghazi, victorious
Giaour, unbeliever
Gora, mountain

Haj, pilgrimage to Mecca
Haji, pilgrim
Hamid, praiseworthy
Hekim, doctor
Hospodar, Viceregent of the Danube Principalities

Ingliz, English
Inshallah, please God!

Kaim makam, lieutenant-colonel, governor of a town
Kapu, gate
Kara, black
Kavass, policeman
Kerim, noble
Khan, inn
Kiui, village
Kol, arm
Kol ordu, army corps
Konak, house, official building

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Kral, king

Lira, Turkish pound (18s.)

Mahalla, quarter of a town
Mejid, glorious
Muezzin, priest
Mushir, marshal

Nizamié, active army
Novi, new

Oglu, son
Oluk, gutter
Ordu, army, camp

Padishah, sultan
Palankah, fortress
Pasha, prince, a title
Pashalik, county
Planina, mountains

Rayah, unbeliever
Romuni, Tsintsars
Rossiori, red hussars
Rushdié, military academy

Sanjak, standard ; also a district
Sari, yellow
Selo, village
Serai, palace
Seraskier, minister of war
Seraskierat, ministry of war
Serdar, commander
Serdar ekrem, commander-in-chief
Skuptchina, house of representatives
Slivovitz, plum brandy
Sobranyé, parliament
Stari, old

Tabiya, battery, redoubt
Tcherni, black

Ulika, street

Vilayet, province

Yeni, new

Zaptié, gendarme

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IV

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS CONNECTED WITH THE HISTORY OF WIDDIN

NOTE.—The author does not wish this Chronology to be considered as a complete historical epitome. It is intended to be a summary of the historical events represented in this volume, and to take the place of an exhaustive table of contents. With this view the numbers of the pages in the text are affixed on which the events recorded here are related there. It was unavoidable, for the sake of unity, comparison, and usefulness, to include in this table some facts which could find no space in the narrative.

		PAGE
29 B.C.	Mœsia incorporated with the Roman Empire	—
First Century A.D.	Bononia built by Romans	2
105 to 107	Dacia incorporated with the Roman Empire	2
270	Dacia lost to the Romans	3
376	Visigoths in the Balkan Peninsula	8
378	Battle of Adrianople between Visigoths and Romans	—
395	Division of the Roman Empire	7
440	Huns in the Balkan Peninsula	8
446	Attila passes Bononia	311
453	Death of Attila	—
454	Dissolution of the Empire of the Huns	—
474	Ostrogoths in the Balkan Peninsula	8
About 500	First mention of Finno-Ugrian Bulgars	8
568	Avars in the Balkan Peninsula	8
626	Slovenes conquer Mœsia	8
678	Bulgars under Isperich cross lower Danube into Mœsia	9
679	Bulgars conquer Mœsia	9
About 700	Bulgars conquer Bononia	10

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802 to 815	Conquests and victories of Bulgars under Krum	—
864	Bulgars embrace Christianity	10
864 to 969	First Bulgarian Empire	10
864 to 888	Michael Boris, founder of the Bulgarian Empire	10
888 to 927	Symeon, Czar of Bulgaria	10
895	Magyars conquer the present Hungary	11
927	Bulgars beaten by the Servians	—
927	Death of Symeon	—
963	Division of the Bulgarian Empire	11
967	East Bulgaria conquered by the Russians	11
971	East Bulgaria conquered by the Greek Empire	11
977 to 1018	Second Bulgarian Empire	12
977 to 1014	Samuel, Czar of Bulgaria	12
1002	Emperor Basilios takes Bidyn	12
„	Basilios loses Bidyn	12
1014	Death of Samuel	12
1018	Bulgaria conquered by Basilios	12
„	Basilios takes Bidyn	12
1018 to 1186	Bidyn belongs to the Greek Empire	12
1151	Servians subdued by the Greek Empire	—
1183	Servian independence under Stephen I.	—
1186	Bulgarian revolt of brothers Azen, Peter, and Joannes	12
1186 to 1398	Third Bulgarian Empire	12
1186	Death of Azen	—
1195 to 1224	Stephen II., King of Servia	—
1197	Death of Peter	—
1207	Death of Joannes	—
1218 to 1241	Joannes Azen II., Czar of Bulgaria	—
1291	Shisman of Bidyn renders himself independent	13
1292	Shisman beaten by the Servians	14
„	Peace of Bidyn	14
1321 to 1355	Stephan Dushan Zilni, Czar of Servia	13
1324	Michael, son of Shisman, Czar of Bulgaria	14
1324 to 1393	Reign of the Shismanides in Bulgaria	14
1330	Battle of the Struma (Küstendil)	13
1353	First appearance of the Turks in the Balkan Peninsula	12
1355	Death of Stephan Dushan Zilni	13
1356	Collapse of the Servian Empire	13
1359 to 1389	Sultan Murad I.	14
1371	Battle of the Maritza	14

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1371	Adrianople Murad's capital	14
1375	Servians acknowledge Murad's suzerainty	—
1382	Sofia taken by the Turks	—
1384	Joannes Stracimir, Czar of Bidyn, afterwards last Czar of Bulgaria, subdued by the Magyars	17
1388	Czar Shisman of Tirnova acknowledges Murad's suzerainty	—
1389	Battle of the Amselplain	14
1389 to 1403	Sultan Bayazid I.	17
1393	Tirnova taken by the Turks	14
„	Bulgaria incorporated with the Turkish Empire	14
1394	Bulgarian Church abolished	14
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1396	Bidyn conquered by Bayazid	17
„	Bayazid loses Bidyn	17
„	Magyars under Sigismund beaten by the Turks at Nikopoli	—
1398	Bayazid recovers Bidyn	18
1453	Turks conquer Constantinople	15
„	End of the Greek Empire	15
1456	Turks conquer Athens	—
1456 to 1474	Wallachia and Moldavia become Turkish	—
1458	Servia becomes a Turkish pashalik	—
1463	Bosnia becomes a Turkish pashalik	—
1479	Albania ceded to the Turks	—
„	Lemnos and other islands ceded to the Turks	—
1483	Herzegovina becomes Turkish	—
1521	Belgrad and Semlin conquered by the Turks	—
1526	Hungarians beaten by the Turks in the battle of Mohacs	17
„	Part of Hungary becomes Turkish	17
1529	First Turkish siege of Vienna	17
1541	Budapest conquered by the Turks	17
About 1580	Greatest extent and supremacy of the Turkish Empire; whole Europe in danger of becoming Turkish	17
After 1600	Gradual decline of the Turkish Empire	17
1683	Second Turkish siege of Vienna	17
1686	Turks lose Budapest and Hungary	17
1689-1690	Margrave of Baden's Widdin campaign	18
1689	14 Oct. Widdin vainly stormed	18
„	19 Oct. Widdin surrenders	18
1690	Turks recover Widdin	19

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1699	Peace of Karlovitz	—
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„	26 Sept. Turkish defeat at Czoroy and Boyeleshti	31
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„	25 „ Turks abandon Calafat	31

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,,	July Russians under Diebitsch cross Balkans	—
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